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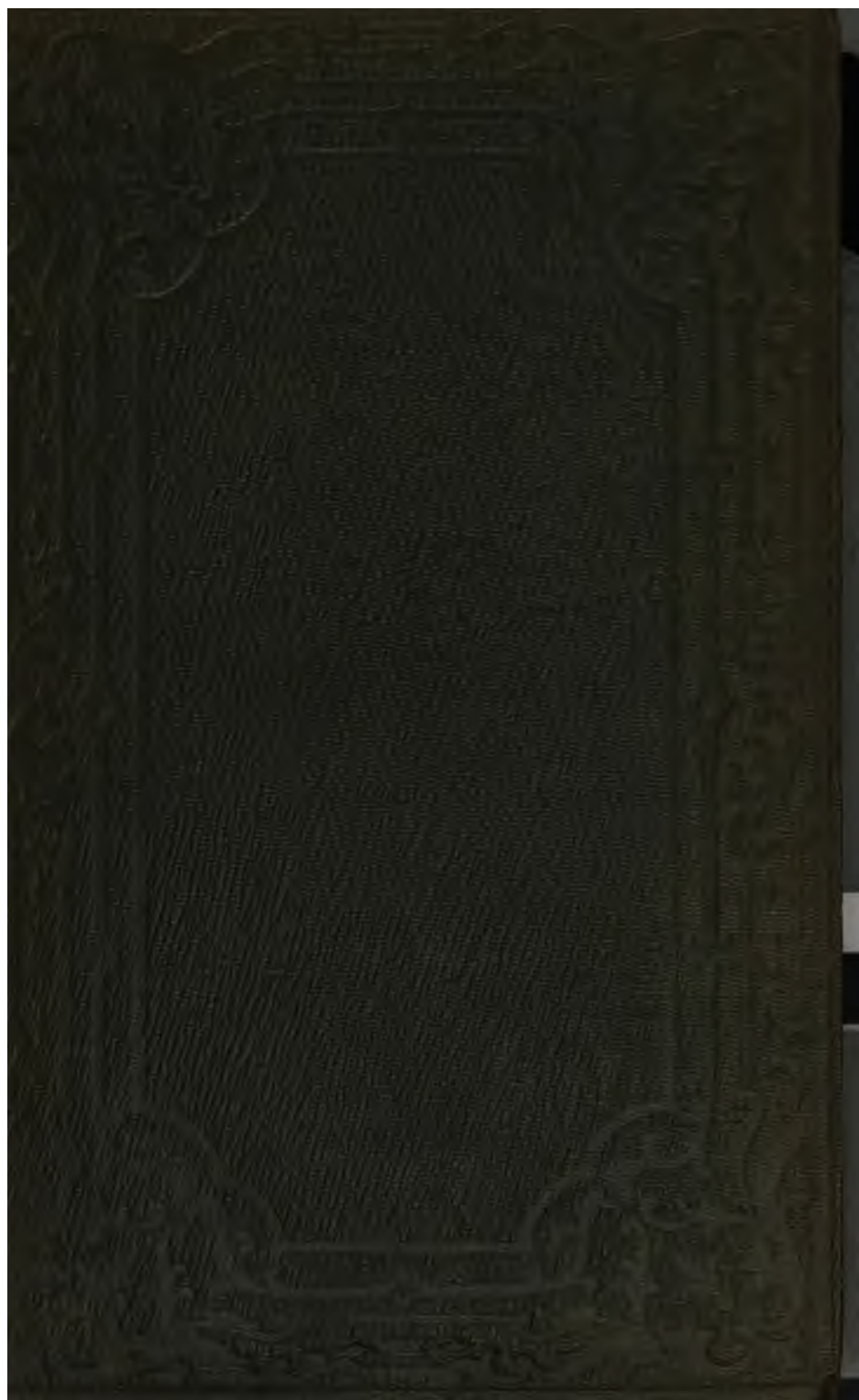
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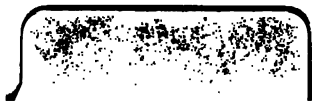
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THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF A
CLEVER WOMAN.

ILLUSTRATED WITH
OCCASIONAL EXTRACTS FROM HER DIARY.

BY MRS. TROLLOPE,
AUTHOR OF
"FATHER EUSTACE," "THE BARNABYS," "MRS. MATHEWS," &c.



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THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES

OF A

CLEVER WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLOTTE MORRIS was the maiden name of the lady whose life and character as maid, wife, and widow, it is my purpose to exhibit to the reader in the following pages.

There is nothing very romantic or exciting in her history ; but if it bears the stamp of truth, it may not be altogether without interest ; for, however widely scattered, or variously placed human beings may be, they never fail to recognize a family likeness to

their race, whenever a tolerably faithful portrait of one of them is placed before their eyes ; and whenever this occurs, a certain degree of interest is sure to be excited.

Mr. Robert Morris, the father of my heroine, who was a banker by profession, and a gentleman by courtesy, continued for many years to exercise his calling with good discretion and with fair success ; but my narrative will not begin with any preciseness of detail, till a year or two after he had quitted business, and then he was living in a very comfortable house in Gloucester Place, with an income of fifteen hundred a-year, and one only daughter, who had just completed her seventeenth year.

His wife had then been dead for several years ; but he had never been tempted to marry again, partly, perhaps, because the reminiscences of his wedded life were not of the placid, peaceful character which would have made him wish for a renewal of that state of existence. For the late Mrs. Morris, though considered by all her acquaintance as a remarkably sensible woman, had not hit upon the right way of managing her husband.

Yet he was, in truth, of a nature to be

managed very easily, and without enduring any great suffering in the process, had it been carried on quietly; but it was not in the nature of Mrs. Morris to do anything quietly, while, unfortunately, it was not in the nature of her husband to like any thing that was not done quietly; and the consequence of this was, that when Mrs. Morris died, Mr. Morris secretly made a vow that he would never marry again.

And this vow was most religiously kept to the end of his life.

After the first emotions which he experienced upon finding himself a widower had, in some degree, subsided, the worthy and tranquil-spirited gentleman would have felt himself to be in a condition of more than ordinary exemption from the cares and vexations of human existence, had it not been for remembering that he had a tall, stout, flourishing young daughter of nine years old, and that he did not very well know what to do with her.

But Mr. Morris was a kind-hearted, conscientious man, and he had not meditated long upon the subject, before a scheme suggested itself to him, which seemed to unite

more than one advantage, and which, as it pleased him the more, the more he dwelt upon it, had speedily the effect of not only relieving his mind from this great anxiety, but of soothing his kindly feelings by suggesting the very agreeable idea that, while doing his duty towards his little daughter, he might perform an act of very useful charity towards the sister of his late (God preserve her soul in peace !) and highly-respected wife.

This sister-in-law was a widow, and a very poor one ; for her worthless husband had spent all his own fortune, and hers too ; and she was, moreover, childless. She was, also, a very gentle-tempered woman, a fact which Mr. Morris had very satisfactorily ascertained during the life-time of his departed lady, who had by no means confined the demonstrations of her own lively temper to himself ; and many was the time, and oft, that he had witnessed scenes, between the gentle Mrs. Buckhurst and his spirited wife, which had left a strong impression upon his mind, that there certainly was no very great moral or mental resemblance between them.

Let it not, however, be for a moment sup-

posed, that good Mr. Morris was in the least degree tempted to infringe any law, whether repealed or not, which refused its sanction to a marriage between brothers and sisters-in-law.

Nothing of the kind ever entered his head ; nothing of the kind ever entered his heart.


But he thought, and very justly, that she would be likely to make him an excellent housekeeper, and he thought, too, that, with the assistance of abundance of masters, his very important and precious little daughter might be educated to his heart's content, without his having to submit to the painful penance of sending her to school.

His fondness for her partook of, and accorded with, the general tone of his character in a very harmonious degree. It was quiet and placid, with no touch of any of that vehement sort of affection, which is so often found to produce more pain than pleasure. He liked very much to be amused, when little or no exertion of his own was necessary to produce the effect ; and the follies and even the wilfulness of the vivacious little heiress were admirably well calculated for the purpose.

She was by no means a crying child ; if she

had been, she would probably have been sent to school as soon after the funeral of her mother as convenient; but, as instead of crying she strutted about in her new black frock with infinite glee, and declared that she liked it better than all her other frocks, because it made her look so old and womanly, her surviving parent felt that his departed spouse had decidedly left him a treasure, and one that he would keep as long as he possibly could, or at any rate till some splendid marriage should come in her way.

My heroine's father was not what could be properly called a proud man, but he might have been fairly classed as a vain one. He was vain of his good house, of his well-furnished drawing-rooms, of the goodness of the wine with which he regaled his guests, whenever he had obtained permission to invite any; and he was vain of the comfortably clear fifteen hundred a-year which his industry and prudence had enabled him to realize. The sensations produced by all this were very pleasant, now that he found himself in a sufficiently tranquil state of mind to dwell upon them; and the vivacity and rosy cheeks of his now unscolded



little girl seemed to open to him a prospect of enjoyment of the same gratifying kind.

The consequence of all these pleasant meditations was his setting off exactly twenty-four hours after his daughter's lively observation on her black frock, to make a morning visit to the widow Buckhurst.

Nature never, perhaps, produced a more capricious contrast of character in one family, than when she gave Mrs. Buckhurst to be sister to Mrs. Morris.

Having said this, no further description of her temper and manners can be necessary, as whatever else remains to be known concerning her, is sure to be developed in the following pages; for Mr. Morris's civil proposal that she should for the future take up her abode with him, was received with unaffected, and very earnest gratitude; and all preliminaries respecting her immediate removal from her comfortable lodging, on the second floor of a small house in Store Street, to the thoroughly comfortable apartment proposed for her in the house of her brother-in-law, were got through with a degree of celerity, which clearly proved that the parties concerned in the business,

were very sincerely desirous to have the change effected with as little loss of time as possible.

"Is aunt Buckhurst going to be here always, papa?" said Charlotte, on seeing the large heavy box, which looked more like a venerable "*old oak chest*," than a travelling trunk, conveyed into the apartment prepared for its owner.

"Yes, my dear; she is going to stay here always," replied her father, "and I hope you are glad to hear it."


"Glad? What should I be glad about? She never gave me any thing pretty in her life, and I don't think she knows what cake means; and she has no more cleverness about playing at anything, than if she were your great arm-chair. No, indeed, I am not at all glad."

"But you are not very sorry, I hope, are you, my dear?" said her father coaxingly.

"Sorry? What for? Good gracious! no, papa! I don't care at all about it, one way or the other," she replied, with rather a majestic toss of the head. "I shan't mind her any more than if she was the table. I never do."

The peace-loving widower had acquired so

strong an aversion for any thing and every thing that seemed to threaten discussion and consequent dispute, that the only sign of disapprobation which he ventured to display upon hearing this rather alarming declaration, was a very gentle shake of the head ; but he just ventured to say, by way of a hint : “ Well, well, my pretty Charlotte ! I dare say you will always be a very good girl, and then every thing will go on smoothly and well.”



CHAPTER II.

DURING the five or six important years which followed, the education of my heroine appeared to be going on very prosperously ; that is to say, she learned to read and to spell with facility, had become a desperately indefatigable little dancer, and a rapid and indiscriminate reader of every thing that came in her way. Moreover, she had learned the catechism, and the multiplication tables by rote, and could both write and cast up a sum correctly.

This is a full and true catalogue of her accomplishments, for she had stoutly and steadfastly resisted all attempts to teach her music or drawing ; but, nevertheless, she so speedily acquired and so steadily retained the reputation of being a remarkably clever young woman, that, while

studying her character, one might have been led to doubt the advantage of a more extended and more varied system of study.

Her copious and very general reading, doubtless, did a good deal towards obtaining this reputation for her; but her keen look-out upon the world, probably, did more still. But we must not thus forestall the result of her education, in describing its progress.

When Mrs. Buckhurst had quietly established herself in her new home, and made herself practically acquainted with all the little details in the management of the house, towards which Mr. Morris particularly wished to direct her attention, she ventured to ask Miss Charlotte whether it would not be a good plan for her to spend an hour or two the first thing after breakfast, every morning, in doing her lessons in the library, instead of lying upon the drawing-room sofa reading story-books.

In return to this gentle question, Miss Charlotte very unceremoniously replied: "No, aunt Buckhurst, I think it would be a very bad plan indeed; and what's more, I won't."

Any rejoinder to so spirited a reply was

quite beyond the power of Mrs. Buckhurst, and a day or two passed without any further allusion to the subject. But the worthy woman did not feel quite at rest in her conscience, as she saw day after day pass away without any re-appearance of the slates and copy-books, which she knew used to be in daily requisition (though the theme of incessant scolding) during the life-time of her sister; and at length she screwed her courage to the task of begging Mr. Morris to let her have a few minutes' conversation with him, some morning, before he went to the bank.

Mr. Morris stared at her with a mingled expression of surprise and alarm.

It had been a pretty nearly daily practice with his departed wife, to request "a few minutes' conversation with him before he went to the bank;" and as these parting conversations were invariably devoted to grumbling on every theme she could think of, and to reproaches for pretty nearly every fault which it was possible for any man, not within danger of hanging or transportation, to commit, it is not wonderful that he should be a good deal startled, and not a little alarmed by these well-

known words of evil omen, addressed to him by an individual whom he had rashly attached to his household, chiefly because he believed that she was the very least likely of all woman-kind so to address him.

For a moment he stood doubtful whether to escape by flight, or more manfully to avoid all such hateful and ghost-like visitations for the future, by letting the requested interview end by giving Mrs. Buckhurst notice that he had reason to think the scheme of their living together was not likely to answer, and that the sooner it was brought to a conclusion the better.

No sooner had this effectual remedy suggested itself, than he civilly told his meek sister-in-law, he was at her service that moment, if she had anything which she wished to communicate to him; and, thereupon, she at once led the way to the library, and having closed the door, proceeded with a degree of timidity which very effectually removed his alarm, to explain her fears lest the hours of his absence from home were not passed by his daughter exactly in the manner he would approve.

Mr. Morris was not particularly well acquainted with the ordinary routine of young ladies' education, but he knew enough to make him aware that his lively, clever little Charlotte might certainly pass her time more advantageously than by lying on the sofa, and reading story-books. He remembered that she was his heiress, and that he intended her to make a great marriage; and that if she were not taught to do something besides lying about and reading story-books, this great marriage might be very difficult to bring about.

He, therefore, not only listened to Mrs. Buckhurst's statement with great attention, but thanked her cordially for giving him so useful a hint. Sending her to school he had made up his mind to consider as absolutely impossible; and he now confessed to his respectful listener, that the having a governess to live in his house would be very particularly disagreeable to him.

"What on earth, then, am I to do, to set all this right?" he exclaimed, so despondingly, as greatly to touch the kind heart of Mrs. Buckhurst, adding, in a tone which expressed more of despair than hope: "Don't you think

that if you were to take courage and try—don't you think, Mrs. Buckhurst, that you could at last make her mind you?"

Had the nature of the worthy woman he thus addressed been a little less scrupulously honest, she would assuredly have given him an encouraging answer, merely from pity, but not even for pity could she say what was not true, and she therefore replied with a deep sigh, and with her eyes meekly fixed upon the carpet, "No, sir, I do not."

"Well! my dear, good woman! then we must try something else. To tell you the honest truth, I *do* think that she is much too clever to be easily managed by any body, and, therefore, as to trying to manage her in little things, I shall vote for our both giving it up altogether; and I don't know that we shall be any of us much the worse for it, for she is as quick as lightning, and would be likely enough to hit upon what was best to be done, before you or I had half done thinking about it. But in the matter of learning accomplishments, that is altogether another question. When I die, Mrs. Buckhurst, she will have fifteen hundred per annum, rather more

than less, and a girl with that fortune must know something beyond just reading, you know, Mrs. Buckhurst. But how I am to set about getting her taught, is the mystery."

"Well, sir, as to that, I think I do know a way to help you," replied Mrs. Buckhurst, cheerfully. "I quite agree with you in the notion that a very clever, well-taught young lady living always in the house might be considered as rather an incumbrance. You, my dear sir, would always know your place a great deal too well to amuse yourself, or her either, with learned talk, you know, sir, about a great many things which perhaps you would understand quite as well as herself. But as for such a poor ignorant person as I am, I should be sure to appear in her eyes as not one bit better than the housemaid, and, therefore, it is plain that there could be no very agreeable companionship for either of us."

"Don't say a word more about it, Mrs. Buckhurst," replied Mr. Morris sharply. "I have told you already that nothing should make me submit to having a governess in the house. It is exactly the sort of thing I most abominate, so there's an end, if you please, of all discussion on that subject."

“ I never will name it again, sir !” returned his half-frightened counsellor. “ What I was going to mention was altogether a different sort of thing. I am told, sir, that it is becoming very much the fashion, and among the very genteel people, to have an accomplished lady come in for three or four hours every day to give lessons ; and when the lessons are finished, off she goes again, without plaguing any body, old or young ; and it seems to me, sir, that this would be the very best plan in the world for your dear, clever little Charlotte.”

Mr. Morris remained silent for a minute or two, and then replied, in a tone which manifested a very marked improvement in the state of his temper and spirits—“ Upon my word, Mrs. Buckhurst, I think that sounds reasonable enough, and at any rate I am quite willing that the scheme should be tried. If it should not answer, why then you know we must think of something else. All that I shall make a point of is, that Charlotte should never be made to cry. But it is you, my dear, good woman, who must settle it all, for I know no more which way to turn in order to find one

of those moveable governesses, than how to find a gold field on Salisbury plain."

"It will be the greatest of all possible pleasures to me, if I can be serviceable to you in any way!" replied Mrs. Buckhurst cheerfully; "and I do think I may be able to help you here, for I know a lady who has two little girls, the eldest just the age of Charlotte, who are receiving their education in this manner, and I heard my friend say the other day, that her governess had lost one of her other pupils, in consequence of the family's going abroad."

"Well then, my worthy sister-in-law, I leave the whole business of the arrangement to you. I will beg you to settle about the terms of payment, and the hours of attendance, all of which you must understand a great deal better than I do," said Mr. Morris, with the happy voice and aspect of a man who suddenly finds himself relieved from a great embarrassment.

"And now," he added, "I will say good bye, till we meet at dinner, by which time I flatter myself you may have made some progress in the negotiation."

"I will do my very best that it shall be all

settled before dinner-time," returned Mrs. Buckhurst, zealously ; "but—but," she added, laying her hand upon the arm of Mr. Morris, to prevent his leaving the room before he had heard the last words, which she was so evidently anxious to utter—"but it is *you*, dear sir, and not I, if you please, who must explain all about it to Charlotte ; I don't think the plan will answer if she thinks it is *my* invention."

"I don't think it much signifies whether I tell her of it, or you. I hope you don't find her rebellious, Mrs. Buckhurst?"

"Rebellious, Mr. Morris? Oh dear me! that is such a very strong word! What I mean is, that Charlotte is so very clever herself, that she knows, as well as you or I do, how to judge of cleverness in others, and we can neither of us blame her, can we, because she thinks you cleverer than me."

"It is all very right and proper, perhaps, that girls should look up with more respect to their father, than to any body else," he replied ; "but that is no reason why she should not pay dutiful attention to you. So, on the whole, Mrs. Buckhurst, I think it will be

better for you to tell her of the new plan we have decided upon."

And having pronounced these words very much with the air of a man who was speaking his real opinion, Mr. Morris again turned away, and proposed to leave the room.

But Mrs. Buckhurst, in spite of all her natural and habitual timidity, seemed on this occasion to be armed with more than common firmness; for with a rapid movement, which almost amounted to a spring, she again seized upon the arm of her retreating brother-in-law, and said, in an accent of resolute determination, which could not be mistaken, "I cannot do it, sir! indeed, and indeed I cannot!"

Whether the faithful widower of the late Mrs. Morris had any latent consciousness on his mind that it was just possible his clever, lively little Charlotte *might* inherit some slight shade of character from her mother, may be doubtful; but if it was so, he deserved very considerable credit for the sort of courageous firmness with which he replied.—"Very well, Mrs. Buckhurst! very well! you need not say any more about telling Charlotte, I'll undertake

that part of the business myself, and the sooner you set about your part the better."

"I will not lose an hour, sir!" was her earnest reply; and then they parted, mutually well pleased; for good Mr. Morris himself, notwithstanding his particularly strong antipathy to all business-like discussions with the fair sex, was not altogether insensible to the flattering conviction which had been forced upon him, that he *was* more likely to have something approaching to authoritative influence over his blooming young daughter than any one else.

Both the parties to the compact thus made performed their respective tasks promptly and well. The "moveable governess" was found to be fortunately at liberty to dispose of herself, from nine till any hour which might be named not later than two; upon hearing which agreeable statement, Mrs. Buckhurst immediately and rather eagerly proposed that she should dine with her pupil at half-past one, an arrangement which her timid use of the house-keeping authority vested in her might have shrunk from making, had it not been from her conscientious and very well-founded mistrust

of her own influence in restricting the appetite of her flourishing young niece to such regulations as might be needful for the preservation of health.

But Mr. Morris, though a prudent, was by no means a stingy man; and so far from objecting to this arrangement, he evidently approved it, even without being enlightened by any hint from the gentle Mrs. Buckhurst as to her private reasons for wishing it.

Within a week after this important scheme was decided upon, it was put in action; the steady, stedfast, sturdy, well-drilled Miss Smith was invested with full authority to awaken the intellect, and cultivate the talents, of Mr. Morris's heiress in the manner which she thought best calculated to bring her great abilities into action.

CHAPTER III.

THE advice of Mrs. Buckhurst was perhaps the very best and most profitable that could have been given, under the circumstances. The abilities of my heroine were exactly such as to profit rapidly by the exertions of a zealous and painstaking instructor.

Had the temper of the little girl appeared of a softer quality, it is probable that Miss Smith, who was a clear-headed, sensible woman, would have followed a very different system with her ; but though still an unmarried governess, Miss Smith was far from being a young woman, and the years which had passed over her since she had entered upon her laborious career, would have been still more wearisome and barren of amusement than she had

actually found them, had she not taken a good deal of interest, partly whimsical, partly philosophical, in studying the endless varieties of character exhibited by her successive pupils.

This study, however, had long ceased to be merely the source of speculative amusement ; she had now, and for many years past, made it exceedingly useful to her, and to her pupils too, for it spared both parties from vainly giving time and labour in any direction, where nature forbade all reasonable hope of obtaining the object aimed at.

In the present case Miss Smith very speedily closed the pianoforte, after inducing Mr. Morris to listen to her plain-spoken assurances—that it was impossible, from the formation of her hearing organs, that Miss Charlotte should ever receive pleasure herself, or impart pleasure to others, by endeavouring to make herself a musician.

The study of drawing very speedily followed that of music. Miss Smith possessed both taste and judgment, and greatly as she wished to find profitable occupation for herself during the precious hours from nine till two, it may reasonably be doubted whether she would not

have preferred a daily dinner with Duke Humphrey, to the misery of attempting to engraft the fine arts upon her new pupil.

The task of leading her to improve her faculties, and increase her amusements by reading, was a very different affair. Here she found her apt enough. She acquired the power of reading French too, with more than common facility ; her hand-writing also was very carefully attended to, and prospered well ; and it soon became the chief difficulty of the “ moveable governess ” to keep her pupil from more promiscuous reading, both in French and English, than she quite approved.

But Miss Smith’s keen study of incipient character had led her to discover other traits in Charlotte Morris than her inaptitude to acquire music and drawing. The species of sturdy wilfulness which she doubtless inherited from her mother was soon obvious to her new governess ; and for some time (not very long) she meditated a good deal on the subject, and made sundry attempts to soften and control it. But perceiving that she evidently did more harm, by making herself an object of dislike, than good, by pointing out the faults

she wished to correct, she deliberately gave up the attempt, and confined her efforts to giving as much useful information, both by reading and conversation, as it was in her power to do.

In this manner they went on very peaceably together, till the young lady had completed her sixteenth year ; and then, although no very strong degree of sympathy existed between them on subjects in general, they both began to be aware, very nearly at the same time, that the one had taught, and that the other had learnt, pretty nearly enough for the attainment of the objects for which they had been brought together.

The young lady had hinted this, with very intelligible plainness, once or twice before Miss Smith had made up her mind to declare to the father and aunt her own persuasion that her pupil was so well inclined to study by herself, as no longer to require the attendance of a governess to assist her.

But at length, finding herself accidentally *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Buckhurst, the conscientious governess opened the subject by saying, that " Miss Charlotte was certainly a very clever girl, and that she did not think she was in need of a governess any longer."

Greatly was Miss Smith surprised by the manner in which this intimation was received by the aunt of her pupil. Mrs. Buckhurst clasped her hands together in a very convulsive sort of manner, gazed silently in the face of the governess for a moment, and then burst into a violent flood of tears.

Miss Smith was indeed greatly surprised. Nothing, certainly, could be more perfectly unbroken than the harmony in which these two ladies had met together at the luncheon-dinner table during the last five years ; nevertheless, as nothing had ever passed between them which could rationally lead the other to suppose she had inspired an attachment likely to produce so violent a burst of grief when their separation was alluded to, Miss Smith felt somewhat at a loss how to receive it ; but she behaved now, as she always did, with great propriety. She thanked Mrs. Buckhurst quietly, but gratefully, for the interest thus shewn for her ; adding, that she trusted she should not lose sight of her entirely, for that she should never cease to remember the uniform kindness with which she had been treated by her during the long period of her attendance on Miss Morris.

This was said so cordially, and so evidently with sincerity, that had the tears flowed from the cause Miss Smith assigned to them, they could scarcely have flowed on so perseveringly. But, in fact, poor Mrs. Buckhurst was too completely overcome by the unexpected shock she had received, to have the power to stop them.

Poor, good woman ! she really was very much to be pitied. Her life had not been a happy one, and very decidedly the last five years had been the most enjoyable part of her existence ; for Mr. Morris had been very kind to her, and she had enjoyed the comfort of feeling that she had been useful to him in return ; for as a housekeeper, she was indeed absolutely perfect—nothing was ever forgotten—no negligence ever permitted, nor any scolding ever heard.

On the other hand, nobody had scolded her. The interval between the departure of the governess and the return of the father was usually divided between a walk with her niece, attended by a smart footman, and writing or reading on the part of Miss Charlotte, which left the gentle Mrs. Buckhurst at

entire liberty to knit socks, read the newspaper, and look over the household accounts, in the most perfect peace and quietness.

Mrs. Buckhurst was not an imaginative person, but, nevertheless, she instantly saw in her mind's eye the difference which the disappearance of Miss Smith would probably cause in her existence ; and the most painful feeling of all arose from the conviction which immediately took possession of her, that the statement of Miss Smith was incontrovertible, and that Charlotte had in truth learnt all that it was in Miss Smith's power to teach her.

This conviction, however, painful as it was, soon became useful to her, for it saved her from the selfish weakness of attempting any remonstrance ; all she said was, when at length she withdrew her handkerchief from her eyes—" I dare say you are quite right, Miss Smith ; but, indeed, I am very sorry you are going !"

It may easily be imagined that the young lady herself, who certainly was not unconscious of her own abilities, did not offer any remonstrance on hearing of the proposed change in the manner of her existence. She had long

thought that her own ideas on most subjects were very greatly in advance of any which poor, dear, plodding Miss Smith was capable of conceiving, and the prospect of having for the future the entire command of her own time, and her own studies, was extremely agreeable to her.

Neither was Miss Smith's assurance that his daughter had really acquired all, which it was in her power to teach her, at all surprising to Mr. Morris. He thought his daughter by many degrees the cleverest and best-informed girl he had ever met with ; and he anticipated with almost as much confidence, and almost as much pleasure as herself, the brilliant figure she would make when introduced to his friends as a grown-up young lady.

The *congé* of Miss Smith was, indeed, well-timed in more respects than one ; for Mr. Morris had for some months past been engaged in settling accounts with his partners in the bank, preparatory to his withdrawing his capital from the firm, and altogether retiring from business.

It had long been his intention to take a larger house, and in a more fashionable situ-

ation, whenever he made up his mind to live as an idle gentleman, to whom a mile or two of additional distance from the Exchange would be no inconvenience; and the idea of having a tall, handsome-looking womanly daughter to do the honours of this new house was very agreeable to him.

The banking concern in which he had for so many years been profitably engaged, was much too well managed to render the act of retirement from it an affair of any difficulty; and though he withdrew his share of the capital because he thought, that if a woman's fortune was in money, it was always best to place it in the Funds, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the doing so was productive of no inconvenience to his partners; his place being immediately supplied by the nephew of one of them, who was in all respects well qualified for the position.

All this important business was settled both rapidly and judiciously; a very pretty and commodious house was taken in Gloucester Place, and workmen sent in to paint and paper it from top to bottom, in excellent style.

Mr. Morris had uttered no vain boast when

he told his sister-in-law that her niece Charlotte would have a fortune of fifteen-hundred a year ; for after he had settled all accounts with his late partners, he found himself enabled to purchase government securities to an amount that not only ensured him a clear sixteen-hundred a year, but a sum beyond it amply sufficient not only to paint and paper his new house, but to furnish the pretty drawing-rooms into the bargain, with a degree of elegance which perfectly enchanted the young heiress, and went far to confirm her persuasion that she should be one of the most distinguished young ladies in London.

Mr. Morris himself, good man, was as happy as his daughter ; for, though as far removed as possible from being naturally of a churlish temper, he had never, through the whole course of his married life, enjoyed the gratification of being considered in any other light at home. To make his late wife feel either pleased or obliged by any thing he could do was utterly impossible ; and the gratification of listening to his daughter's grateful raptures, and her aunt's more sober approval of every thing he did, was as delightful to him as it was new.

There was one point, however, on which he steadily refused to indulge himself, by complying with the ardent wishes of his daughter. Nothing she could say or do could induce him to keep a carriage. Fortunately for the young lady's future welfare, her father had lived long enough in the world, to have seen a considerable number of easy fortunes made very uneasy, by a very small excess of expenditure, beyond the actual and certain income; and, perhaps, he never gave a stronger proof of his devoted and unselfish affection for her, than by the unflinching resolution with which he persevered in his refusal to grant her what was so evidently the first wish of her heart.

There was one other point of their financial arrangements which caused some little discussion, but this was soon arranged greatly to the young lady's satisfaction. The question was concerning the amount of the yearly stipend which was to be allowed her for the expenses of her toilet; and, as Mrs. Buckhurst was present on the occasion, her brother-in-law, partly, perhaps, as a matter of civility, and partly because it was probable she might know more upon the subject than either him-

self or his daughter, asked her what she thought would be a handsome and proper allowance for the purpose.

Nothing could be more modest than her answer ; but, unfortunately, it fell upon the ears of her young niece as the very height of presumption.

“ I am afraid, sir,” she began, “ I am greatly afraid, that my poor judgment can be of little use to you, or to your dear Charlotte in this matter ; for I have never been placed in a situation where nice dresses were so suitable and so much needed, as they certainly must be by her ; but, in *my* unmarried days, I considered twenty pounds a-year as a very sufficient allowance.”

“ Well, I think I have heard the same in my own young days,” said Mr. Morris ; “ but I shall make no objection to a little more extravagance than that, on the part of my daughter. She is my only child, you know, Mrs. Buckhurst, and I shall wish her in all ways to make as good an appearance as is consistent with my means. If I had half-a-dozen children, I should be a poor man, and it would be my duty to do all things accord-

ingly ; and, as it is, you must not suppose me guilty of the folly of fancying myself a rich one. I know better than that ; but, nevertheless, I think that, all things considered, I may indulge my feelings by being liberal in this matter, and I don't think I shall be ruined if I make up my mind to double the sum you have named. What shall you say to that, Charlotte ?”

The complexion of Charlotte was at this moment very considerably heightened, and a flash of indignation darted from her eyes, as she directed them towards her unlucky aunt. For a moment she was silent ; but then, turning her back as nearly as possible upon poor, frightened Mrs. Buckhurst, she said, “ I can't help feeling a little surprised, papa, that a man, who knows the world as well as you do, should think my aunt Buckhurst a proper person to advise you on such a subject as this. I must say that I think even my own opinion, upon this one point at least might have been more to the purpose than hers. I *should* have thought that, let her good qualities be what they may—and I am sure I am not going to question any of them ;—but I *should* have

thought that her general appearance in the article of dress was not exactly what you would approve for me. But, I suppose I was mistaken."

"No, you were not mistaken, Charlotte," said the indulgent father in reply, though looking a little vexed, perhaps from more feelings than one, for he really had a very sincere respect for his sister-in-law: "No, you were not mistaken in supposing that I wish you to be more gaily, and, of course, more expensively dressed than your good aunt. Sensible women of her age know perfectly well that it is a great folly to dress fine, for that it only makes them look older instead of younger. However, you may be right in supposing that she may not be as good a judge of the expense of a young lady's dress as you are yourself, and therefore I have no objection whatever to your letting us hear your own opinion on the subject. Come, come, Charlotte! do not look as if you were going to cry, or scold either; but tell me at once what you should consider as a proper and sufficient allowance for your dress?"

"It is very disagreeable to me, papa, to be made to say any thing about it," she replied;

“and if my aunt,” she added, with an angry glance, “if my aunt had not thought proper to interfere, or had not talked such very absurd nonsense about it, I should have wished to leave the matter entirely to yourself. But as you now insist upon my giving my ideas on the subject, I will neither disobey you by keeping silence, nor commit the contemptible folly of telling a lie about it. I must, therefore, confess to you fairly, that I am quite certain I cannot dress, as your daughter ought to dress, for less than sixty pounds a-year.”

“Sixty pounds a-year!” returned Mr. Morris, rather solemnly, “seems a good deal, my dear. However, I will agree to it, Charlotte, and, by the help of your good aunt’s excellent management in house-keeping, I hope I shall be able to abide by my promise without inconvenience.”

“Thank you, dear papa!” returned Charlotte, in the gay caressing tone that she well knew her father best loved to hear. “Thank you! you are always kind, generous, and good! and I hope that, on my part, I, too, shall manage well, and continue to look always exactly as you would wish to have me look.”

A very cordial kiss was then exchanged between the father and daughter, and thus this delicate and important discussion ended, equally to the satisfaction of both ; for the young lady did not enjoy the prospect of gay attire more than the old gentleman did the sight of her gay smiles. Mrs. Buckhurst, meanwhile, though heartily glad that the scene was over, did not retire from it without a painful feeling of anxiety for the future. Sixty pounds a-year was, in her estimation, a fearfully large sum for a girl of seventeen to spend upon the decoration of her person ; and an emotion, almost amounting to terror, seized upon her for a moment, as she thought of what might be the consequences, if the same influence was used to obtain the greatly coveted carriage too.

She remembered with a dismal groan, poor woman ! how very easy a process her departed husband had found it to spend, and spend till his last shilling was gone ; and her concluding prayer, as she rose from her knees that night, was, that she might be dead and buried before her good brother Morris was a ruined man.

It might be, however, that Mrs. Buckhurst

was more capable of appreciating the kindness of Mr. Morris's heart, than of forming an accurate estimate of the firmness of his principles. Mr. Morris was not a man by any means likely to ruin himself; but he was still less likely to do any thing that might ruin his daughter, even if, by doing so, he could have secured the great blessing of keeping her in eternal good humour to the last hour of his existence.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSIDERING that our heroine's father from the age of seventeen,—when he returned from the two years' schooling on the continent, where he had finished his education by acquiring a competent knowledge of French and German—considering from that time, to the period of which I am now speaking, he had never been anything but a banker's clerk,—and then a banker domiciled in or very near the City—he managed wonderfully well in arranging his social position, and in changing his residence from the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury Square to Gloucester Place.

By some means or other, very quietly achieved, he contrived to slide gently, but effectually, into a new and more refined set of

acquaintance ; and though he was quite incapable of cutting an old friend, he made no scruple, when selecting a new one, of taking care that he belonged to that class of society, among which he thought that it would be most advantageous to his daughter that she should take her place.

In doing this, he displayed considerable acuteness and considerable tact ; and many a man, having the reputation of greater intellect, might have been less successful than our quiet Mr. Morris in finding himself exactly in the situation, local and social, in which he wished to be.

But when a man, possessing a tolerably clear head, being void of all very absurd opinions, and vehement in advocating none, not afflicted with any peculiarity of idiom or accent, and having nothing in his personal appearance to excite particular attention—when such a man is desirous of getting into society, he is generally successful ; and such a man was Mr. Morris.

Moreover, in addition to all this, he had some very good notions respecting his dinner-table, and was quite aware that the old-fashioned

jokes about the superior *gourmandise* of the City were quite out of date ; so that, on the whole, few young ladies of seventeen, the acknowledged heiresses of sixteen hundred a-year, but, unhappily, without having a mother to watch over them, could boast of a more agreeable introduction to the world.

The first few weeks which followed their entrance into their new house were very busy, but by no means disagreeable ; for every day that passed added something to the beauty or convenience of their habitation ; even poor Mrs. Buckhurst had a share in this enjoyment, for Charlotte was too much occupied to torment her in any way, and in the performance of her own innumerable tasks, she had the satisfaction of seeing every thing she suggested, and every thing she did, approved by Mr. Morris.

Nor was there indeed much danger that any of her arrangements, or preparations for their future comfort, should be interfered with by her niece ; for nothing could be much more distinct than the respective objects to which they severally directed their attention. Mrs. Buckhurst, as the intelligent reader will readily believe, omitted nothing that could render the

kitchens, larders, pantries, and store-rooms both useful and commodious ; while her equally active-minded niece,—after casting a hasty glance into the best bed-room, and pronouncing that, when it was properly furnished and decorated, it would do very well for her—devoted herself, heart and head, to the furnishing and decoration of the drawing-rooms.

It would be difficult to find any human being, of any age or sex, more completely satisfied with themselves and their position, than my heroine was at this time ; and she became so bright in her looks, and so gay in her demeanour, that her father was almost as well pleased with her as she was with herself.


Almost, but not quite : for Charlotte Morris most decidedly thought herself beautiful—but this she was not—nor did her father make any great mistake about the matter. He saw that she was tall and well-grown, though rather more stout than girls of seventeen are usually seen to be ; but he consoled himself for this, by thinking that “she would grow out of it, and probably become a very fine woman.” He thought, too, that she had very fine eyes, though less partial observers might

have differed from him, on account of their being so widely opened, and so nearly round. But it would have been difficult to persuade him that her complexion was not exceedingly beautiful: and assuredly it had at that time all the beauty which the tint of florid health could give; but there was nothing about her approaching to delicacy, either of colouring or of expression. Her teeth were large and white, but not quite regular; so that their being ornamental was a doubtful point among her friends and acquaintance; some people declaring that she had "beautiful teeth," while others scrupled not to assert that they were "perfectly dreadful." The real fact was, that they were neither. They certainly always looked bright and clean—but, on the other hand, they were much more constantly conspicuous than was desirable. *Au reste*, those who are kind enough to permit me to introduce her to their acquaintance, must form their own opinion of her on this point as well as on all others; for she was one of those persons concerning whom the opinions of those around differ greatly.

The change of residence, and the active

employment to which Charlotte had so delightedly devoted herself in consequence of it, had very greatly relieved the mind of Mrs. Buckhurst from the fears to which the departure of Miss Smith had given rise. 'The idea of having to pass long mornings with her niece, watching her incessantly occupied in reading books, which she herself considered as either idle or pernicious, and not daring to propose any employment less dangerous and more profitable, lest she should meet either sullen silence or such vehement vivacity of opposition as she might feel it hard to bear—this idea had greatly tormented her.

But now it seemed a settled thing between them, that they were each to follow their own occupations, without interfering with the other. Mrs. Buckhurst, of course, being employed upon the useful, and Miss Charlotte upon the ornamental parts of the establishment; and Miss Charlotte, to do her justice, performed her part extremely well. The ready money which her father had dedicated (after closing his account with his partners) to the decorating his new abode, was so amply sufficient to do all that was wanted, that every thing went smoothly.



Whatever Mrs. Buckhurst asked for, which could improve or facilitate the domestic arrangement, was immediately ordered, without any questions asked ; and nothing which it entered the lively Charlotte's head to consider as either useful, or ornamental for the drawing-rooms, was refused ; while Mr. Morris himself had the satisfaction of finding that he might now furnish his dining-room in perfect accordance with all the latest devices for comfort of which an accomplished upholsterer could tell him, without running any risk of exceeding the estimate he had originally made for the purpose.

All this was naturally agreeable to all the parties concerned, and indeed they, all and each of them, seemed to enjoy it very much.


But the business of furnishing a house cannot last for ever ; and when they had all walked together through every room, and declared in concert that they did not see what could be done to improve any of them, Mr. Morris said, "That as that was the case, he should have all the bills sent in immediately, for that until they were all paid, he should not consider himself as the rightful owner of anything he saw."

This was intended as a notice to both the ladies that their shopping labours in the furnishing line were at an end; an idea which was confirmed very greatly to the satisfaction of Mrs. Buckhurst, by Mr. Morris's reply to a subsequent question from his daughter, as to whether an additional ottoman might not be desirable in the third drawing-room.

"About desirable, I don't know, my dear Charlotte," he replied. "I only hope that you do not particularly desire it—for most certainly, my dear, you cannot have it. My accounts for the furnishing of the house are all settled and closed, so you must consider that business as finished and over."

Charlotte knew with very convenient certainty when her father was quite in earnest, and when he was not; and the result of this knowledge on the present occasion was, that she asked for no more ottomans.

No very long time elapsed before Mr. Morris announced to his sister-in-law, in a *tête-à-tête* interview, that he was going to have a dinner-party, consisting of four gentlemen, that he wished the dinner to be excellent, but not ostentatious; and that he trusted entirely to her as to every thing, excepting the wine.



“Do you wish Charlotte and myself to dine at table, sir?” she enquired.

“Yes, Mrs. Buckhurst, I do,” was his reply; “and it is for that reason that I have asked so small a party. I find, Mrs. Buckhurst,” he continued, “that I have made many very agreeable new acquaintances in consequence of belonging to a good club; and these four gentlemen are among those whom I most constantly meet there. Now, it strikes me as very likely, that we shall by degrees have ladies to call upon us, as well as gentlemen; and whenever this happens, I shall, of course, be very careful to select those who appear the most eligible as acquaintance for Charlotte, by way of regular visitors; but it would not do to bring all this upon the poor girl at once, and the way to prepare her for receiving many gracefully, is to accustom her to receive a few without shyness. I don’t think there is any thing so awkward in the whole world as a very shy woman. It is altogether impossible for any man to feel at ease with them, and when people are not at ease, it is not very likely that they should feel pleased—to say nothing about being captivated. Now I cer-

tainly do wish my daughter to please, ay, Mrs. Buckhurst, and to captivate also ; and it is for that reason that I wish to accustom her as early as possible to receiving company at home."

"I dare say you are quite right, sir," returned Mrs. Buckhurst, meekly. "It has never been my lot, as you well know, sir, to have much experience in such matters. My sister was so much cleverer than I was, that I had no need to care about being shy myself : and I think it will be the same thing with dear Charlotte. She is a great deal too clever to be shy."

"I hope she is, my good friend," was his reply : "but our hopes on this subject must not prevent our doing everything we can to assist nature in this respect, as well as in every other, in which her improvement is concerned."

"Certainly, sir ; I understand that clearly," she replied ; "and I hope, from what you say, that you will yourself have the kindness to point out to her whatever you may wish to see changed in any way, as to appearance, and manner, and every thing ; for I am sure you are an excellent judge, and have seen so much more of the world than I have, that you would

know in a minute what was wrong, and what was right ; while I should have no more notion about it than a baby."

"That is all very true, my dear Mrs. Buckhurst," he rejoined ; " I have no doubt that I may be able to point out many little things that it may be useful to remark upon, but I don't anticipate many difficulties in that way ; Charlotte is very quick, and if I point out any thing to you, it will be very easy for you to give her a little good-humoured hint, you know, without uttering a word approaching to scolding."

" Oh, sir !" began the terrified Mrs. Buckhurst in an imploring tone, and looking at him as if about to beg for her life ; for, notwithstanding the undeniable fact that she was not so " quick " as her niece—she was not so slow as to be unaware of the threatening cloud which was hovering over the brow of her respected brother-in-law. " Oh, sir ! I will do every thing which you may desire me to do," were the words she uttered, instead of the declaration she had meditated, of the utter hopelessness of her ever attempting in any way to control her high-spirited niece.

It is more than probable that Mr. Morris was aware of the difference between the promise thus given, and the words which the good lady would have spoken, if his frown had not stopped her. He was too wise a man, however, to put difficulties in his own path solely for the pleasure of overcoming them; he, therefore, replied, with the air of being perfectly satisfied — “Very well, very well! that is all I want; you may depend upon it that I will give you a hint, from time to time, as to what you ought to say to her; and if you will reflect upon it a little, Mrs. Buckhurst, I am sure you will agree with me in thinking, that it would not do at all for so young a girl as Charlotte to have no lady with her, who would consent to take the trouble of telling her of any little blunders she might make.”

This proposition was too reasonable to be contradicted, and “Yes, sir,” was the reply it received, though the poor lady knew, much beyond the pleasant possibility of doubt, that her lecturing the waves of the sea upon their being too boisterous, was quite as likely to render them calm, as any thing she could say to her niece would be to influence her proceedings.



CHAPTER V.

THERE was no great danger that this first of Mr. Morris's Gloucester Place dinners should be a failure, because all those concerned in making it successful were very zealously desirous that it should be so, and, what was perhaps more important still, they had "all appliances and means to boot," to ensure its being so.


Mr. Morris was himself intimately acquainted with every bin in his cellar, and made a selection on this occasion which shewed considerable respect to the guests he expected. Mrs. Buckhurst seemed inspired with even more than her usual earnestness of purpose—in seeing and knowing that every thing ordered by the master of the house should be the very

best, and choicest possible ; and Charlotte took especial good care that the most becoming dress she could devise should be ready for the occasion.

Nothing, in short, was omitted which could contribute to give a favourable impression of themselves, and their new abode, to the four new acquaintances whom Mr. Morris had selected for his *coup d'essai* in the important experiment of dinner-giving in his mansion, with his blooming young daughter to assist him.

The party selected consisted, as we have said, of four gentlemen, viz. : a Mr. Herbert, a Mr. Folkstone, a Mr. Knighton, and a Mr. White.

Mr. Herbert was a young man still, though he seemed scarcely to think so, for his usual manner was not only more grave than gay, but he had the tone among young men, and still more perhaps among young women, of a person decidedly neither so young nor so lively as themselves. His real age, however, did not exceed thirty-three years, but though decidedly a handsome man, he was generally supposed, by those but slightly acquainted with him, to be at least half-a-dozen years older.



His acquaintance with Mr. Morris had commenced, as was the case with the three other gentlemen who were his guests on this occasion, at the club he had alluded to, and owed its especial origin to the civility with which the *soi-disant* middle-aged gentleman had yielded the Times Newspaper to the new member, on perceiving that he was waiting for it somewhat impatiently.


Mr. Folkstone was a well-looking, well-mannered, well-dressed old gentleman, the amount of whose income, though often canvassed by his acquaintance, was still unknown to any of them. There was one fact, however, that was very decidedly well known to them all, namely, that he was the devoted father of one only son. The acquaintance between this gentleman and Mr. Morris was, in fact, the result of a very decided determination on the part of Mr. Folkstone, that he would become acquainted with him; and the thing had been achieved without any great difficulty, for the appearance and manners of Mr. Folkstone were such as to produce a very favourable impression.

Mr. White was a pleasant, good-humoured

bachelor of fifty, who lived in handsome bachelor lodgings at five minutes' distance from the house of Mr. Morris, and the acquaintance between them had originated in their first accidentally walking home together from the club at the hour of dinner, and subsequently doing the same thing so frequently, that it had almost become a habit.

Mr. Knighton had the honour and happiness of possessing as good a house in Gloucester Place as Mr. Morris himself, and this alone, perhaps, might have pointed him out as an eligible acquaintance ; but it was not this alone, which gave him importance in the eyes of Mr. Morris. Mr. Knighton was, in fact, not only the most stately guest at this little initiatory banquet, but, in the eyes of the giver of it, incomparably the most important person there.

In truth, that identical dinner would never have been given at all, had it not been for the eager desire felt by Mr. Morris to improve the acquaintance, which had accidentally begun at the club, with Mr. Knighton ; for this gentleman had a wife and two daughters, all three of them looking models of elegance and



fashion, as they stepped into their handsome family equipage.

No wonder, therefore, that Mr. Morris was desirous of improving an acquaintance which might be so likely to lead to a visit from such ladies to his daughter; and no wonder that he had been so anxious that every thing belonging to his establishment should on that occasion appear to the greatest possible advantage.


The anxious father, notwithstanding his immense dislike to saying any thing to Charlotte which might have a tendency to make her look cross, did venture on this very important occasion to hint, that he did not wish her to laugh very loud, nor to eat very fast; and, equally to his surprise and satisfaction, he found himself listened to, not only without frowns, but with something more than mere civil attention.

Mr. Morris was quite aware that his daughter was a clever girl, but in some respects she was really more clever than he was aware of. He had no idea, for instance, how perfectly well she was aware, that unless she obtained some fashionable female acquaintance, she never could become fashionable herself.

Novel-reading, if it teaches nothing else, must decidedly teach something more of the manners of the world, and the age in which we live, than any other study whatever; and as my heroine was more "deeply read" in novels than most girls of her age, it was not extraordinary that she had a better general idea of what was necessary, in order to obtain the place she wished to occupy among her fellow mortals, than many young ladies, who might perhaps have been better informed on other subjects.

It was this which made her listen without a frown to the repetition of a phrase which was usually most distasteful to her; it was this which made her look as if even desirous to hear more, while her father reiterated again and again the heretofore detestable phrase, "You must do this," or "You must not do that."


In short, the wish to appear to advantage in the eyes of Mr. Knighton, in the hope of obtaining thereby the acquaintance of the ladies of his family, whose aristocratic-looking exits and entrances, from the house at three doors' distance from her own home, had so



often made her sigh with envy, was strong enough to make her endure almost any thing which might assist her to obtain it.

Young as she was (her seventeenth birthday having but recently been celebrated), the natural propensity to coquetry, so generally ascribed to all women, had become rather remarkably developed in her; but her thoughts were upon this occasion so earnestly fixed upon the great object of appearing lady-like and sensible to Mr. Knighton, that the idea of captivating the younger men of the party did not for an instant come in competition with it.

From the moment her father had explained to her that one of the gentlemen, whom he expected to dine with him on the great day for which the whole house seemed making preparation, was the master of the family whom they saw go out every day in that handsome carriage, from that moment Charlotte cared for no other guest! She no longer wished that her dress should be the most becoming, but the most discreet and lady-like in her possession, and it was in the same spirit she listened to all the gentle hints of her papa, respecting sundry little peculiarities which had




probably grown upon her, solely because Mrs. Buckhurst had been so indiscreet as to object to them, and which, though tolerated by him "as pretty Charlotte's way," were decidedly not pretty in themselves. These little blemishes were now really in a fair way of being corrected; for so attentively did she listen to every word he uttered, relative to the usages of grown-up young ladies in society, that it was highly probable she would never again perform any of the free-and-easy vagaries which had hitherto withstood all her aunt's timid remonstrances.

There was still one point, however, on which there seemed to hang considerable difficulty, although Mrs. Buckhurst very stedfastly declined giving any opinion upon it. This knotty question was no less a one, than whether Miss Morris was to sit at the head of her father's table, or not?

It was evident that neither father nor daughter found it at all easy to make up their minds as to what they wished, or [willed, on this important subject.

The father's first object in life was to surround his daughter with every advantage, and



every honour he could bestow ; and the idea of her being the graceful and admired mistress of his house was inexpressibly delightful to him ; but with all his immense partiality, and the vehement admiration for almost every thing she said or did, which accompanied it, he could not quite divest himself of a sort of nervous dread lest her youthful gaiety, or her unsunned *innocence*—he could not even in solitary meditation express his fear by the word *ignorance*—might lead her into some breach of etiquette, which it would be a dreadful mortification to him to witness.

And yet her sitting at the table like a mere ordinary young lady was terrible, too !

Nor was the mind of the young heiress herself at all more decided on the subject. She, too, shrunk from the idea of being thrown into the shade, but she was not wholly unconscious of the fact, that she no more knew how a lady ought to behave when presiding at a dinner-table, than how a General ought to manage a battle ; and the idea that she might begin the new career upon which she was entering by a blunder of any kind, was sufficient to damp the courage which was really on most points

capable of sustaining her spirits very sufficiently.

The result of these feelings, on the side of both father and daughter was, that just at first it would be better for her to retain the position in her father's house of a quite young girl, and to let her aunt preside at the dinner table.

It was not, however, without a slight pang at her heart that Charlotte's assent to this was given, for the idea of presiding was already very dear to her; but she was not insensible to the charm suggested by the words "*quite young girl*,"—she had read too much to permit her being so,—and she reasoned with her usual acuteness as she decided that even supposing "*quite young girlhood*" to be less delightful than "presiding," it would be wiser to enjoy both in their turn; nor did she forget, as she thus decided, that as soon as ever she got tired of being considered too young, she might, with a very little good management, change immediately from mere girlish charm to womanly power, without fear of opposition from any one.

The important day arrived; Mrs. Buck-

hurst in a new chocolate-tinted silk gown, and Charlotte in a pretty robe of snowy whiteness, sat side by side upon the uncovered green satin sofa, in the second drawing room, and received the four strange gentlemen, as they arrived in succession, in very good style, Charlotte blushing very brightly, and Mrs. Buckhurst smiling very courteously.

The first symptom of well-conducted household arrangement displayed, was in the briefness of the interval which intervened between the arrival of the last guest, and the announcement of dinner ; and, upon hearing the ever-welcome sound, Mr. Morris gave his arm to his sister-in-law, saying, " You must permit me to shew you the way, gentlemen ;" adding, as he paused for a moment in passing Mr. Knighton, " Will you have the goodness, Mr. Knighton, to give your arm to my daughter ?"

The order of march thus established, the party descended to the dining-room, where even the watchful and anxious eye of Mr. Morris himself could espy nothing which was not exactly as he wished it to be ; nor, as the important hour went on, did any disappoint-

ment of any kind occur to lessen his satisfaction.

The dinner was indeed an excellent dinner, and the four strangers felt that it was so; neither were they at all insensible to the really good style which seemed to pervade the little establishment; and the intelligent master of the house saw with extreme pleasure that Mr. Knighton—by far the most important personage in his eyes,—though he conversed with every body, and was by no means inattentive to the blooming Charlotte at his side, contrived to find time to look about him in a way, which shewed plainly enough that he was not one of those dull individuals who can only see one thing at a time.

On the other side of Charlotte sat Mr. Folkstone, a stout old gentleman, some half-dozen years at least the senior of his host, but still very well inclined to enjoy a good dinner, and exceedingly desirous, on the present occasion, to make himself agreeable. But to do him justice, this wish of propitiating the favour of his new acquaintance was by no means for the sake of enjoying future good dinners; for Mr. Folkstone had an only son, whose welfare in

all ways was infinitely dearer and more important to him than any other object in life.

Upon being invited to dinner by Mr. Morris, he had made inquiries respecting him and his belongings, which had elicited the very important fact that Mr. Morris of Gloucester Place had one only child, and that this child was a daughter. It might have been pretty obvious to any man, who gave himself the trouble of thinking about it, that the only child of Mr. Morris of Gloucester Place would, in all human probability, inherit a handsome fortune.

Now this was a sort of question concerning which Mr. Folkstone was disposed to take very considerable trouble, in order to arrive at the true solution of it, and as it happened that few, or rather no impediments came in his way in this particular instance, he took his place at the dinner-table of Mr. Morris, with a sufficiently accurate knowledge of his worldly affairs, to leave him in no doubt as to the very great desirability of cultivating his acquaintance.

Nearly opposite to Charlotte sat Mr. Herbert, a gentleman who was afterwards described by her as "a middle-aged man, whom she dared

say might have been very handsome-looking when he was younger." Beside him sat Mr. White, the individual who has been already described as a good-humoured bachelor of fifty.

Charlotte was, upon the whole, extremely well pleased with the party. "It was plain enough," as she told herself when she pretended to fall asleep upon returning with her aunt to the drawing-room, "it was plain enough that there was nobody of the party that it was possible for any girl to fall in love with. Mr. Herbert indeed, though he did look so grand and so old, might have done very well, by way of a beginning, to fall in love with her; and so perhaps he would have done, if he had not been such a fool as to go to the other side of the table; but as to returning his love, she should as soon think of losing her heart to the Lord Chancellor."

So she wasted but little thought on him. Still less, perhaps, did she bestow on Mr. Folkstone or Mr. White. No! the person decidedly most interesting to her, as well as to her papa, was Mr. Knighton. It was not only because he had taken so much more notice of her than either of the others had done, but because he

had a fine, fashionable-looking lady for his wife, and fine fashionable-looking ladies for his daughters, and because they kept a fine carriage, and because they lived so near, that if they would but come and call upon her, they might be of the greatest use in the world.

If this thought had occurred to an unmarried lady, still in want of a chaperon, but having reached the reflecting age of five and twenty, there would have been nothing remarkable in it ; at seventeen, however, it showed a justness of thinking not often found so early.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN people, having a specific object in view, act rationally in their manner of pursuing it, the chances are greatly in favour of their obtaining it.

There was nothing very striking, nothing much out of the common way in the proceedings either of Mr. Morris or his daughter ; but had their proceedings been dictated by the very highest order of human intellect, they could not have succeeded better.

The dinner party which has been described in the last chapter, was given on Wednesday, 24th May, and on Monday, 29th, Mrs. Knighton and the two Misses Knighton, accompanied by Mr. Knighton himself, were ushered into Mr. Morris's drawing-room.

When rational people act rationally, they rationally anticipate a rational result ; and it was for this reason that Mr. Morris had postponed, for an hour or two, his daily visit to his club, and that his daughter had not only a vase of very choice flowers upon her table, but that she was herself as advantageously displayed as they were. Mrs. Buckhurst was not now in the habit of passing her mornings in the society of her niece, and Charlotte, therefore, was alone, with a volume of Macaulay in her hand, while a lady-like work-box, and a morsel of lady-like work assisted, with a few other well-chosen volumes, to give her table an air of lady-like occupation.

Her dress, too, was very exactly all it ought to have been ; and, if the dining-room of the mansion had propitiated the father, the drawing-room was quite as successful in producing a favourable effect upon the mother.

As to the daughters, the youngest of whom was seven years older than Charlotte, they knew nothing about the dining-room, and cared nothing about the drawing-room, but they were very favourably impressed by the style of Charlotte's dress. They did not

think her the least bit in the world well-looking—unmarried ladies approaching to thirty rarely do think unmarried ladies approaching to twenty, well-looking ;—but the Misses Knighton were more susceptible to the attractions of female dress than to the attractions of female features, and they acknowledged that Miss Morris's "*things*" were really beautiful. "Sleeves and collar all real lace," said the eldest. "And I firmly believe that lovely gown came ready-made from Paris," added the youngest.

"And there she was, sitting up in lemon-coloured kid gloves, that, I could swear, had never been drawn on before this morning," joined in the mother.

As this took place in the carriage, which was conveying them all to a private picture-gallery, the three ladies had the advantage of Mr. Knighton's opinion in addition to their own.

"I have a great notion," he said, "that old Morris is a rich man, though I am told he does not keep a carriage. He has been for years a partner in a very good banking concern ; and now he is setting up as a private

gentleman, he has wisely determined not to go too fast. The girl is a smart, showy girl, and will have a fine fortune, you may take my word for it, ladies."

"Yes, papa, I rather suspect so," said his eldest daughter. "We all know, don't we, what a dreadful expense keeping a carriage is? and the old gentleman, having got his money in business, knows the value of it, I dare say."

"No doubt of it, my dear, no doubt of it," returned her father, laughing. "Those business people, I believe, always enjoy saving money more than spending it. Not, however, that we have any reason to suspect our new acquaintance of being a stingy man. There are many people who keep carriages, who neither would nor could give such a highly-finished dinner as Mr. Morris gave last Wednesday."


"No, no, there is nothing like stinginess in the establishment. It is easy enough to see that," said Mrs. Knighton. "I think it by no means improbable that we may find them agreeable neighbours. The old gentleman may like giving dinners better than keeping a carriage, and, perhaps, if he did both, he

might spend more than he ought. His keeping a carriage would make no difference to us, you know ; and it is very convenient sometimes for people who have not been newly-furnishing a house from garret to cellar, like this Mr. Morris, to be able to borrow trifles that may be wanted at a moment's notice."

" Oh ! yes, mamma ! I can easily understand that," replied her eldest daughter, with a slight smile ; " but I don't imagine we shall be likely to see there any people really worth meeting."

" I don't see that at all, Margaret," returned her mother. " You may depend upon it, that such a man as your father describes Mr. Morris to be, would not take such a house, or furnish it in such a style, or give such dinners, or let his daughter dress so expensively, if he had not some notion in his head of marrying the said daughter ; and if he has, you may be very certain that there will be plenty of young men at the house."

" That's true, to be sure," replied Margaret ; " but still it does not follow, you know, that there might be any among them that we should care about. Your father was the son of a



baronet, you know, mamma, and though he was himself only a clergyman, yet still that is very different from being a banker."


"Very different, indeed, Margaret!" said her father, laughing; "so different, my dear, that I would venture a trifling bet, that Miss Morris will have about ten times as much money as I got with your mother. But then I got your pretty face into the bargain, my love," he added, with a gallant bow.

"But, mamma!" said Miss Louisa, the youngest daughter, who had been listening to this discussion with great attention, "there does not appear to me, that there would be any great advantage in our being put in the way of meeting a parcel of fortune-hunting young men, whose only object in visiting our neighbour would be to marry his daughter."

"Well said, Louisa!" cried her father, laughing heartily; "I don't think I ever heard a more sensible remark. Nevertheless, my dear, I vote for our being civil to our new neighbours, not for the sake of accidental flirtations with stray fortune-hunters, but because I consider it advantageous to be on good terms with people who give good dinners, par-

ticularly when there seems to be no particular necessity for giving them good dinners in return. It is rather a serious thing to make a new acquaintance with people who, being regular dinner-givers themselves, expect to receive regular dinners in return. But it is quite clear that there is nothing of that sort to be feared here. The old aunt is evidently too completely a nobody for any one to dream of inviting *her* to dinner ; and the girl is quite young enough as yet to stay at home with her, and to be vastly well contented at being asked to come in the evening."

"Perfectly true, my dear," said his wife, with a smile and a nod indicative of very decided approval. "If you will just make use of your common sense, girls, you will agree with your father as cordially as I do on that point. Nothing answers better than being on terms of friendly intimacy with just such people as these. It is quite evident that they are rich enough to be convenient, and having the father to dinner now and then, when there is an odd corner to spare, may be very easily managed. Nor will there be the least objection to our having that well-dressed girl in of



an evening. She is just well-looking enough not to be a blot ; and the servant who lets us in is quite well-looking enough to be borrowed to wait, either at dinner or evening either—not to mention many other trifling accommodations which such a house may furnish, if we manage well. So the Morrisises are to be our intimate friends and neighbours, if you please, young ladies, whether they have the advantage of being related to any titles or not.”

“Fear not that I should object to your decree, *mamma mia*,” replied her eldest daughter. “There is not the slightest danger that we should either of us become jealous of the young lady. She is not positively and absolutely ugly, and that is the very most we can say of her personal attractions.”

“Decidedly !” exclaimed her sister ; “nay, I am not sure that Margaret, in saying so much, is not giving way a little to her amiable propensity for patronizing. Let it pass, however ; let us all agree to declare, both in public and in private, that Miss Morris is a fine, tall girl of her age, and that we none of us think her ugly. But ugly or not, I am inclined to take *mamma*’s view of the case,

and I prophesy that she too may be useful as well as the tall footman. At this very moment, for example, I should be exceedingly well pleased to obtain half an hour's possession of the cuffs she had on to-day. The pattern is exactly the sort of thing I have been wishing for."

With so much of harmony in the family counsels of their neighbours, there was not much danger of disappointment in the hopes of the house of Morris respecting the intimacy they wished to establish. The next day was suffered to pass over without any progress towards it, but on the following morning a neat little three-cornered note was presented to Charlotte, containing these words:—

"My dear Miss Morris,

"I am commissioned by mamma to ask if it would be agreeable to you to take a drive with us this morning? We are going to a nursery garden at Fulham, to see if we can get nosegays for a party this evening, not absolutely ruinous. Say *yes*, and we will call for you at half-past two.

"Your's very truly,

"MARGARET KNIGHTON."

"Yes, my dear Miss Knighton, with many thanks!" was the rapidly written reply; and it was sent off without consulting either aunt or father, for not only was the happy Charlotte quite aware that no opposition was likely to be offered, but she was quite aware too, that if such opposition were possible, she should in some manner or other have been perfectly well able to set it aside.

But though she wanted no one's permission to sanction her making the engagement, she had no dislike to the idea of being congratulated upon it; and no sooner had she dispatched her note, than she hastened to the library, which was the sanctum of her father, and almost before the "Come in," which replied to her knock, was pronounced, she stood before him with Miss Knighton's note open in her hand.

"What have you got there, my dear?" he said, in a tone which showed that he had discovered from her aspect that it was something agreeable. She replied by silently placing the note in his hands.

"Very well, Charlotte. This is just as it ought to be," he said, returning the note, and

perhaps making a slight effort not to look too much delighted. "I suppose you have no particular engagement, my dear, to prevent your accepting the invitation?"

"No, papa, I have written to say that I will go."

"You have sent the answer already?" he replied, looking for a moment rather surprised. "All very right and proper, my dear, quite right and proper not to keep the servant waiting. I am very glad to see, Charlotte, that you know how to do the right thing at the right time. It was much better for you to make up your mind at once, and send word you would go, than wait for a family consultation about it. I am glad to see that you know how to act for yourself. I should not like to see you a nonentity."

"I hope you will never see that, papa. I should not like to be a nonentity," replied Charlotte, with a smile that had considerable meaning in it.

The drive to the nursery garden was an exceedingly pleasant drive. All the four ladies were very conversable, and they talked and laughed, too, as pleasantly as if they had

been acquainted for half-a-dozen years. Had this been the case, however, it is probable that their talk would have been in some degree different; for though some lively sallies were uttered on all sides, as they drove through the park, respecting the dust, and the saucy staring of some of the gentlemen, and the hideous bonnets of some of the ladies, there was, nevertheless, a little under-current of question and answer which might not have proved so interesting had they been longer acquainted.

The pretty show of flowers at the nursery garden delighted them all. It was not quite so new to my heroine, perhaps, as her new friends expected it would be: for though her father so resolutely denied her a carriage, he really denied her very little else, and she had often before, by the aid of a well-appointed "Fly" (which of late had made her cheeks tingle as if it had stung her), visited this same nursery garden, and left sundry shillings and half-crowns behind her in exchange for the pretty bouquets with which her drawing-room table was almost always adorned.

The man who attended them round the conservatories immediately recognised her, and

not only very respectfully touched his hat, but more than once appealed to her as a judge of the value of flowers, when the two young ladies or their mamma were rather too hard upon him in depreciating the value of his blossoms.


"Oh! you have been here before, my dear," said Mrs. Knighton.

Charlotte only bowed her acquiescence, but the gardener replied for her by saying, "Oh dear yes, ma'am, Miss Morris comes here with her papa very often, and she buys a great many flowers; few young ladies understand the value of flowers better than Miss Morris."

"If you are a good customer, dear, do bargain for us!" said Louisa, coaxingly, and at the same time taking her arm and giving it a gentle squeeze.

"I am going to buy some flowers myself," replied Charlotte, in a friendly whisper, "and if you think I can manage best because papa's such a good customer, I can buy some for you at the same time. What is it you would like to have?"

"Like? Mercy on me, my dear! That is



not the question. Should I not like to have two or three of those moss roses? And should not I like to have a bower of that flowering myrtle to put them in? And should I not like to have a bunch of those glorious geraniums? You have no idea how divine they are in the hair! The camelias are all over, I see. But just look at that miniature orange tree! Fancy the effect of that mixed with the myrtle!"

Charlotte walked on very quietly beside her, listening to all she said, but without replying to her raptures; and after a time she dropped her arm, and, quickening her steps, overtook the gardener, and whispered to him for a few minutes.

The man listened very attentively, and when she ceased, nodded his head and said, "I understand, Miss. It shall be all right, you may depend upon it."

He then left them, beckoning to another man as they passed out of one house into another, and, giving the party over to his attendance, was out of sight in a moment. After a much shorter interval than would have been necessary on any other spot of earth to

achieve the same task, he returned to them again, bearing a bouquet which Flora herself might have culled as gems, with which to adorn her bosom or her brow at an Olympian festival.

“ Shall I place it in the carriage, Miss ?” said the bearer of it, addressing Charlotte.

“ Yes, if you please,” was the ready reply ; upon receiving which the man stepped forward, but in the next moment Charlotte followed with a step more, rapid still, and overtaking him within a minute or two after he had left the conservatory, drew out her purse and paid him for the flowers, without wasting a moment in complaining of the price, or in attempting to make him reduce it.

A few shillings at that moment did not appear of much importance to her. This part of the business settled, she returned with a quick yet quiet step to rejoin her new acquaintance. Meanwhile, neither the eyes nor the intellects of the Misses Knighton had been idle.

“ Mercy on me !” cried Miss Louisa, as soon as Charlotte was out of sight, “ mercy on me ! what extravagance ! I shall not buy any

flowers at all, Margaret. I don't choose to see our carriage filled with flowers that the queen might wear, while I am nursing up a little posey, which this lavish young lady would scarcely think good enough for her doll."

"We *must* buy something, Louisa," replied her sister, "that she may not suppose we suspected her purpose; but I will bet you what you please, that she means to give them to us. Mamma is quite right about the probable convenience of these new neighbours. You see how she dresses, but yet they keep no carriage, and most certainly there is nothing very extraordinary in her wishing to become intimate with people who do. I really like her, for my part, and shall certainly make myself as agreeable to her as I can."

Charlotte was again beside them before these observations could receive any reply, and Mrs. Knighton at once making a decided movement towards the carriage, the party were speedily reseated in it, the window being elegantly occupied by Charlotte's splendid nosegay.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS MORRIS was, of course, set down at her own door; and, on leaving the carriage, repeated her thanks to Mrs. Knighton, in very proper form, for the pleasure which the excursion had afforded her.

Considerably to the disappointment of her companions, however, she took her bouquet with her. But the two Misses Knighton were still in the midst of a little sisterly discussion on the folly of which they had been guilty, in trusting to so very vague a hope as that which had induced them to abandon their project of procuring flowers for their evening decoration, when a splendid silver waiter was brought to them, on which *two* beautiful bouquets were blooming.

The offering was accompanied by the following note.

“ My dear Miss Knighton,

“ Will you and your sister kindly do me the favour of accepting the flowers which accompany this note? When about to place them in the vase for my table, it struck me that they would be infinitely better employed if you would wear them; and my domesticated myrtles furnishing me with a little additional green, I have ventured, by the help of my maid, to construct *two* bouquets, which will be greatly honoured if worn by yourself and Miss Louisa.

“ Believe me truly yours,

“ CHARLOTTE MORRIS.”

The offering was certainly a very welcome one; and moreover the bouquets were so well made, as to convey a very favourable impression as to the skill and taste of the personal attendant of their new *friend*, for such they were perfectly well disposed to call her. The silver waiter therefore conveyed an extremely civil note back again, “ many thanks ” being summed up in the flattering words, “ I hope we shall meet again soon.”

My young heroine, as we have seen, did

not always consider it necessary to consult her papa concerning what she was about to do; but she was well enough disposed to communicate anything which had already occurred, particularly when, as in the present instance, she felt rather proud of her own part in what she had to relate. She did not often blunder upon this point; she knew her father quite well enough to ensure her being right, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, in the judgment which she formed upon what his opinion was likely to be.

In the present case she was not only right as to his general approval, but equally so as to the sort of commendation she received.

"Perfectly right, my dear. I certainly could not have dictated anything more judicious; and I assure you, Charlotte, that it is a great pleasure for me to find as often as I do that your judgment is beyond your years. It takes a great deal of anxiety off my mind; for I well know that there are many points respecting the every-day conduct of a young lady in your peculiar situation, which no father in the world can judge of so well as the young woman herself, provided she is as clever as I believe you to be."

“Indeed, papa, I shall always do my best to act properly, and in such a manner as I think you would be likely to approve,” was his daughter’s meek reply, and their interview had the agreeable result of pleasing both parties ; for Mr. Morris could not rejoice more at finding his daughter capable of acting for herself, than she was at the prospect which seemed opening before her, of being permitted to do what she wished, and what she willed.

“And when do you intend to return the visit of these ladies, my dear?” said Mr. Morris, with a little affectionate tap on the shoulder.

“I mean to call there to-morrow, papa,” she replied. “And, of course, my aunt Buckhurst must go with me ; for as yet, you know, there is no intimacy between us that could justify so young a girl as I am in running in to them by myself. But I will tell you how I mean to manage, in order to avoid the chilling stiffness of a visit made with my aunt, who you know never speaks a word in company. I mean to defer the visit till I have seen them go out in the carriage, and then you know the next move must come from

them; and if our acquaintance is not turned into mere ceremony by the formality of a morning call with my dear aunt, I have little doubt that this next move will be an invitation."

"Well, Charlotte, I am rather inclined to believe you are right," said her father. "And you can leave my card, you know, with yours."

"Yes, papa, I assure you I thought of that too."

And the visit was accordingly made, the three cards were left at the door of their aristocratic neighbour, and the father and daughter prepared themselves to wait patiently for the result.

They were not doomed, however, to wait long, for, on the day but one following, a printed invitation arrived for a party at the distance of three weeks, with the word "dancing" in the corner. Nor was this all. The card was accompanied by the following note.

"My dear Miss Morris,

"I hope nothing will prevent our having the pleasure of seeing you on the 20th; but we have none of us any inclination to let the interval pass without our meeting.

We were very sorry to miss seeing you, when you called, but morning visits rarely produce a meeting between the parties, as everybody goes out at the same time. Will you and your papa, and your aunt also, console us for thus missing you, by coming in to us this evening? We have no party whatever, excepting a few friends who are coming to dinner.

“Yours very sincerely,

“MARGARET KNIGHTON.”

Of all the notes which had as yet reached the hands of the young Charlotte, this was decidedly the most welcome. It was not without a little difficulty that she conquered her eagerness to reply to it instantly; but she came to the conclusion, after the meditation of a minute or two, that it would not quite do, as yet, to take her papa “out visiting,” without consulting him a little on the subject. This mark of filial respect was the more easily decided on, from the conviction that she saw no risk whatever of meeting opposition to her wishes; and, in truth, not more than about two minutes and a half were lost by it, before she found herself at liberty to sit down and write

the words, "we shall be most happy," with considerably more sincerity than generally accompanies the phrase.

As to consulting Mrs. Buckhurst, that was quite a different affair, and appeared to her of so little importance, that it was not till after she had dispatched her note that it occurred to her, that it would be necessary, in some way or other, to protect herself from the intolerable annoyance of being chaperoned by "such a figure" as that of her aunt. But on this point also, she felt her usual confidence in the success of her own manœuvres.

"I should be little fit for the station I expect to hold," thought she, "if I found any great difficulty in managing such a matter as this."

Nor was she at all mistaken in this estimate of her own power. The question was settled entirely to her satisfaction with no trouble, and very little loss of time. Charlotte knew that her aunt always made it a point to walk round the dinner-table every day before the dinner was announced, in order to ascertain that every glass and spoon were as bright as they ought to be, and that no object could

meet the eye of her excellent brother-in-law, when he threw round the room the critical glance which always preceded his sitting down at table, that could in any way be displeasing to him.

That very important epoch, the dinner hour, was adhered to with such reverential exactness in the house of Mr. Morris, that his daughter knew exactly at what moment she should be likely to encounter her aunt, in the performance of this part of her daily duty ; and she found her, as she expected, examining every object with an accurate eye, even to the angle at which the spoons were placed, and the form in which the napkins were folded.

“ I thought I should find you here, ma’am,” said Charlotte, in a more lively tone of voice than she was accustomed to use in addressing the quiet old lady. “ We are invited to go to Mrs. Knighton’s this evening. I rather expect that the young people are going to practise a quadrille, and that they want me to help them. Do you wish to go with us, ma’am ? ”

“ Oh dear, no, my dear ! quite out of the question ! If it is proper that any thing at all should be said about me, I am quite sure that

you will say exactly what is right; perhaps, my dear, it would be as well to say at the very beginning, that I am not in very strong health, and that I never do go out visiting; and I hope and trust that your dear, good papa won't object to my staying at home, because there is always a good deal of work to do—looking over the stockings and the linen; and you might please to mention to him, my dear, if you will be so kind, that I have got a touch of rheumatism in my knee, and besides that, there are a dozen and a half more of the new table-napkins still left to be hemmed. Will you be so very kind as to say all this for me, my dear?"

"Yes, to be sure I will; that is, if I find it necessary to say any thing about it; but I believe that papa will always think himself quite chaperon enough for me," replied Charlotte.

"And it is very right and proper that he should think so, my dear," returned her aunt; "for who can be so fit, and so able to watch over you, and take care of you, as your own dear papa?"

"Yes, I quite agree with you, aunt Buck-

hurst," returned the young lady; "I should be greatly ashamed of myself, if I wanted any one else to take care of me."

And thus was settled at once, and for ever, one very important particular in the social position of Miss Morris;—her quizzical old aunt was never to attend her as a chaperon.

If she could at that moment have made herself invisible, it is probable that Charlotte might have danced with joy at feeling that a torment, which she had often groaned to think was possible, had thus vanished for ever. She had, it is true, been tolerably certain that she should, in some way or other, be able to shake off a yoke which she knew right well would be most particularly galling; but, nevertheless, the having got rid of it, without any shaking at all, was very pleasant, and she tripped up stairs to the drawing-room, where her father was waiting for a summons to dinner, in a very happy state of spirits. But, however gay she might feel, she was not so thoughtless as to forget that this pleasant arrangement must be made known to him, and receive his approval; and Charlotte was not a person likely to put off any thing that was

essential to her own convenience. It was, therefore, with a rapid hand that she turned the lock of the drawing-room door, and with a quick, as well as a gay step, that she bounded towards the place where her father was sitting.

"I hope," said she, "that we shall have a pleasant evening to-night, papa ; and I hope, too, that you will get your rubber."

"Yes, yes, there is no danger of any disappointment about that, Charlotte ; our good neighbour is quite as fond of a quiet rubber as I am ; and I doubt not that you will amuse yourself very agreeably with the young ladies : but how will your dear good aunt get on, Charlotte ? I am afraid she will find visiting very dull work."

"It is just like your dear, kind heart, thinking about that, papa," returned his daughter ; "but though my heart is not one half so everything that it ought to be as yours, I have not been altogether unmindful of dear, good aunt Buckhurst upon this occasion."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, my dear child," he replied ; "have you said anything to her about it, Charlotte ?"

"Yes, papa, I have ; and I am very glad

that I have got this quiet minute in which to tell you what has passed. She says, dear, good soul—and I must say that I think she is very right—she says, papa, that ‘*you* are the only proper person to chaperon me when I go out :’ and I not only think her right in this, but I think also that there would be a great deal of positive cruelty in forcing her to do what she dislikes so very much as she seems to do, the idea of going out with us ; and I must say, dear papa, that I think there was a great deal of good sense in what she said about your being by far the most advantageous protector I can possibly have, let me go where I may. I really could not find one single word to say in reply when she said so, except that I was quite of the same opinion myself.”

Miss Charlotte might have for years devoted all her acute faculties to the study of her papa’s character, without obtaining a clearer knowledge of it than she evinced in this speech.

“Do you really think so, my dear child ?” he replied, looking at her very fondly. “If you do, Charlotte, I think it would be very wrong, and very unnatural, if I did not agree with you. Moreover, we ought to be very thank-

ful, my dear, to find that we all three agree so well upon the subject. Your good aunt is upon all occasions one of the most really sensible women I ever remember to have met with, and she is quite right now, Charlotte. There is no denying it, I *am* certainly the most proper protector for my own child, and that being the case, it would, as you say, be really nothing short of wanton cruelty if we were to insist upon her changing all her little comfortable long-established habits, when we know that there is not the shadow of a reason for her doing so."

The servant entered the moment he ceased speaking, and announced that the dinner was on the table ; whereupon Charlotte playfully passed her arm under his, and they descended the stairs together in as perfect good humour with each other, and with everybody else, as it was well possible for a lady and gentleman to be.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE best way, perhaps, of showing the effect upon my heroine of the first evening visit she had ever made in the character of a grown-up young lady, residing in a handsome house in Gloucester Place, will be by copying her own account of it from her journal :—

“ June 4. I never fully understood the sort of pleasure which may be found in good society till last night. By good society, I of course mean fashionable society ; for no well-educated girl in my station of life could bestow that epithet upon any other, without betraying a coarseness of mind, which might justly be stigmatized as disgraceful.

“ I often think, as I pen the pages of this journal, that the time may come, when they

may be read by other eyes than my own ; but this idea never has, nor ever shall, impede the free current of thought and feeling I have indulged in, from the first hour in which I resolved to record the events of my life, the feelings of my heart, and the workings of my mind.

“ If I ever attain celebrity of any kind, such a record as this would be eagerly sought for after my death ; and the only way in which to avoid giving disappointment instead of gratification, is by shewing myself as I am.

“ I remember reading in some book, whose author's name I have forgotten, that ‘ an autobiography written with perfect sincerity, and recording the real feelings of its author, would be an invaluable work ; ’ and such a work I am determined to attempt, though it is possible that I may not have courage to go on with it. The reason why I record this purpose now, as also why I have not recorded it before, is, that it is now only that I seem to have learnt the real value of my intellect.

“ Never till last night was I conscious of the pleasure of talking, where I was both looked at and listened to, as being decidedly some-

thing out of the common way. I hate self-conceit; and, if I hated it for no other reason, I should do so because it gives an air of folly to all who are afflicted with the weakness; and I almost think I had rather *be* a fool than *look* like one. But if I despise self-conceit too heartily to become subject to it, I almost think that I despise self-depreciation more deeply still.

“The human being who is conscious of possessing either great talent, or any other personal advantage, is, in my opinion, ungrateful to heaven, if he disclaims it. I shall in future make the pages of this journal a test of my own strength of mind in this particular. If, upon throwing a glance from time to time over them, I detect that paltry affectation of modesty which leads ordinary people to say, that they are unable to judge of this, that, or the other, I will throw away my pen, and burn my journal. It might do very well for Dogberry to exclaim, ‘Write me down an ass,’ when addressing those around him; but it would *not* do for Charlotte Morris to echo this permission when addressing *herself*.

“So much by way of preface to the record of my existence as a woman. Hitherto I

have felt but as a child. It may have been as an intelligent child, perhaps; but it was only last night that I began to feel what it was to be a woman.

“On entering the drawing-room at Mr. Knighton’s, we found many more people than we expected, but they were almost all ladies. The dinner-party, as I found afterwards, had consisted wholly of gentlemen; and the ladies we met there, in addition to the family trio, were invited, like ourselves, for the evening. At the first glance I own I was disappointed. These pages will record my follies and my blunders, as frankly stated as the most flattering triumphs that may be in store for me. And now, with no further preface, I will go on to record what occurred on this, to me, important evening; important as being my first entrance into what I consider as really good society.

“I had the pleasure of immediately perceiving that my appearance was approved. I believe most girls of seventeen are attractive in some way or other, and I have no reason for believing that I am likely to be an exception to this *law of nature*, for such it certainly is.

“Nay, I see no good reason why I should not state, merely by way of memorandum, that, whatever I may be hereafter, I certainly am, at present, handsome, though not, perhaps, absolutely beautiful; at least, I have seen others whom I think decidedly more beautiful than myself; and I note down this observation with pleasure, as a satisfactory proof that I am exempt from that lamentable species of weakness, which shrinks from acknowledging superiority in others. Neither was I at the moment, nor am I now, at all insensible to the fact that the good taste and costliness of my dress had something to do with the gracious glances with which I was received, when Mrs. Knighton presented me to her cousin Lady Wilcox Smith, and the two Misses Wilcox Smith, her daughters.


“Where should I have been now (in the scale of society I mean), had I lacked courage at the important moment, when the amount of my allowance was discussed? Thus far, at least, I may fairly congratulate myself upon my success, not only on this point, but on every other on which I had made up my mind to succeed; and, by the help of a tolerably

clear judgment and a tolerably firm spirit, I flatter myself that I shall go on as I have begun.

“The Misses Wilcox Smith are any thing in the world but handsome, but they are both of them most decidedly lady-like, and quite the sort of people which just at first I am the most anxious to meet. By and by it may be different; when I have attained the place I wish for in society, I shall, I think, be less particular, as to mere outward appearance and manner, and endeavour to make my way among people of talent. Of course, the perfection of society is only to be found where both unite. And who shall say that the day will not come, when I may find myself the centre of both?”

“But I must not forget the recent past, while meditating on the distant future.

“Before I had time to give more than a hasty glance to the other ladies, the gentlemen who had formed the dinner-party entered the drawing-room. Papa was immediately introduced to several of them; but they were not any of them introduced to me, so I suppose it is not the fashion. There was, however, one of them who spoke to me, and that was the



Mr. Herbert who was one of the four who had dined with us last week. I did not think him quite so old-looking as I did at first, and, I dare say, many people would call him very handsome. He is tall, and rather fashionable-looking I believe, but not the least like my notion of what a young man ought to be. I suppose he is near-sighted, for he perpetually used a glass, and seemed to me to be looking at every lady in the room, one after the other, in a way that in most people would have seemed very impertinent. However, nobody seemed sufficiently to his taste to attract much of his attention after the first look, and he ended his survey by talking to my father all the time they were both sipping their coffee. But almost immediately after this was over, the drawing-room door was again thrown open by the footman, and 'Mrs. Mortlake and Miss Herbert' were announced. And then the mystery of the eye-glass was explained, for the moment this Mrs. Mortlake and Miss Herbert entered, Mr. Herbert joined them, and Louisa Knighton told me afterwards that the elder lady was his aunt and the younger his sister.

"As to the aunt, there was nothing very re-

markable about her. She was not by any means handsomely dressed, but, somehow or other, she did not look like a low person, which I always think my aunt Buckhurst does. But as to her niece, I could almost be romantic enough to say that it did not signify a farthing how she was dressed, for she was so very beautiful, that she would have looked lovely in any thing. I thought she looked very young, almost young enough to be her brother's daughter. However, Louisa told me that she believed she was quite as old as I am, and that Mr. Herbert was only her half brother. And now I soon perceived that we had come too early, for a good many people came dropping in afterwards, and they were almost all young, both the men and the women ; and then, to my great delight, Mrs. Knighton sat down to the pianoforte and began playing a waltz.

“Margaret immediately came to me, and asked if she should introduce a partner ; to which I readily answered in the affirmative. But before she set off upon this friendly errand, she was spared the trouble by Mr. Folkstone, who brought up a tall, thin young man, not very handsome, but very fashionably

dressed, and introduced him to me as his son, Mr. Cornelius Folkstone.

"This young man immediately asked me to dance; and from that moment I think I may date the commencement of my really grown-up career; for from that moment I was made to feel that I was not only a grown-up woman, but a very captivating one. It would, in short, be but vain affectation were I to attempt to conceal from myself the fact, that I made on this occasion the first real conquest of my life; nor should I be true to the resolution I have formed, of recording with scrupulous sincerity every feeling of my heart in these autobiographic pages, if I were not to confess that my perception of this fact gave me pleasure. Neither will I shrink from confessing, also, that this pleasure did *not* arise from any reciprocity of feeling on my side. Mr. Cornelius Folkstone is not, in my opinion at least, at all a sort of person to fall in love with at first sight. His face is not handsome, and there is something rather odd and absent in his manner. Nevertheless, his evident devotion did, as I have said, produce a very vivid sensation of pleasure at my heart. This

pleasure might be a matter of surprise to myself, conscious as I am that I am not in love with him in return, were it not that I recognise the especial will of providence in it.

“It is doubtless better for society in general, and certainly it is far better for the female portion of it, that the tender passions they inspire should ever occasion them more pleasure than displeasure. In all the admirably drawn pictures of society which modern novels give us, the propensity of men to become enamoured of every charming woman who comes in their way, is too invariably brought forward to leave any doubt of the fact ; and this being the case, is it not evidently a merciful dispensation of providence that women, even when they do not return love, are never really displeased by it ?

“I am myself so firmly convinced that this pitying feeling is the will of Heaven, that I am quite determined never to check it in myself, but to receive all the love and admiration that may be offered to me, with the gentle kindness which it deserves.

“I well know that if I had a thousand lovers, I could only select one from among them ; but



this is no reason why I should treat the rest with harshness, nor will I do so. If the feelings which this poor young man has evidently conceived for me go on increasing, as most probably will be the case if we meet often, I fear that, for a time at least, perhaps for a year or two, his peace may be destroyed! The idea is painful, but it must not induce me to swerve from the principles I have laid down as the rule of my conduct. I never will treat any man harshly who loves me, but trust to a kind providence, instead of rude barbarity for his cure.

“All these new thoughts must, of course, make me feel rather anxious, but, nevertheless, I cannot conceal from myself the fact that the last evening was the most delightful one I ever passed in my life.”

Mr. Morris did not keep a journal, and, therefore, his opinion of the party cannot be given so fully; but, on the whole, he seemed very well pleased: for he thought his daughter looked very well, and as she danced every dance, he doubted not that other people admired her as well as himself. Moreover, he got his rubber, and left the drawing-room an

hour after midnight in high good humour, and well disposed to agree in the opinion expressed by his daughter, that "the Knightons were exactly the right sort of people to make pleasant neighbours."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. MORRIS and his daughter were perfectly correct in the judgment they thus passed upon the Knighton family. They were exactly the right sort of people to make them pleasant neighbours, for they had it in their power to bestow much that the Morris family wanted. And had Mrs. Knighton and her two daughters delivered their judgment with equal sincerity respecting the Morrises, they would have declared them exactly the sort of people to make convenient neighbours, for they too had it in their power to bestow much that the Knighton family wanted.


The class to which the Knightons belonged is by no means a very small one anywhere, but is probably particularly abundant in Lon-

don. It consists of people who, possessed of many natural and social advantages, endanger them all by the silly practice of spending a little more money than they have got.

Wherever this practice takes hold of people, they can never again find themselves really and truly at ease in their circumstances; for if exactly the number of hundreds or of thousands at which they might state their deficiency were at once added to their income, a very few months would again place them in the same position; for it is the immutable destiny of such persons always and for ever to spend a little more than they have got.

This is a species of madness, however, which admits of method, for I am not speaking of persons who actually ruin either themselves or others.

Mr. Knighton, for instance, was not in the slightest danger of being arrested, nor were Mrs. and the Misses Knighton in the slightest danger of having the orders given to their tradespeople either refused or neglected. No! they were none of them at all likely to ruin themselves; they only one and all, jointly and severally, contrived to keep themselves per-



petually uncomfortable, by always having a little bill or two which they did not exactly know when they should be able to pay. Yet all and each of them would have been ready to declare, and they might have done so with a very safe conscience, that they never lost sight of economy in anything they did, and that they never made a payment, however trifling, without using their very best endeavours to make it less.

"Louisa!" said her elder sister, the day after the little impromptu dance which was mentioned in the last chapter, "I have a strong inclination to poison you."

"May I ask why?" returned the philosophical Louisa, very gently.

"Yes, you may, and I will answer you. My inclination to poison you arises from my perceiving what a very delightful thing it is to be an only daughter. If I had seventy pounds a-year now, instead of the half of it, I might have the gratification of wearing on ordinary occasions a dress as elegant as that worn by Miss Morris last night, and that too without the hateful bore of remembering that I have not paid my last year's shoe bill."

"Yes, and I think it highly probable that just when you are beginning to take measures to poison me, I shall be preparing a dagger to stab you," replied Louisa. "It is a very fine thing," she added, sententiously, "to be an only daughter."

"You may turn your acute observations to better account, my dear young ladies, than such idle jesting," said Mrs. Knighton, gravely. "If we cannot afford to let you dress as expensively as the only daughter of our banking neighbour, we contrive to do for you much that it is not in his power to do for her. I do not allude now to our keeping a carriage, that being a matter of necessity to people of our condition, although it may not be so to people of theirs. A family connected with the aristocracy by near relationship to an old title, are not at liberty to spend their money in lace and embroidery; or, at least, they must first take care to comply with the more strongly marked features of aristocratic arrangement. I could name many instances where this rule is conscientiously followed by people perfectly worthy of being looked to as an example. Take Lady Tyndale, for instance. Her

brougham, with its appurtenances, is a perfect model, and there is not a man in town of any rank or judgment who would not tell you the same ; but, to my certain knowledge, she never has a dress that is not made at home, nor does she ever, by any chance, wear real lace. Such a woman as that may be much more profitably studied as a model, than any banker's daughter in Europe."

"Oh, yes, mamma, I am quite aware of that," replied Margaret ; "and though we have not a model brougham, I am quite aware of the importance of a carriage, and I certainly would not give it up for the sake of dressing like Miss Morris. We were only joking, you know."

"Yes, of course, I do know it ; nor have I any thoughts of taking you *au pied de la lettre* as to the wishes you have expressed to murder each other. My lecture has another object : I wish to point out to you, my dear girls, that in this case, as in most others, a sober and useful moral may be drawn, as well as a gay and idle one. My opinion very decidedly is, that the near neighbourhood of these good people may be really useful both to them and to us."

“ Though I have as yet seen nothing in the manners either of the father or the daughter, that I could reasonably object to, I am, nevertheless, very decidedly of opinion that they will find our drawing-room very different, in the way of society, from any that they have hitherto been accustomed to frequent ; while, on the other hand, I am led from several circumstances to believe that they are more at ease in their finances than we are. ‘ Help one another ’ is a precept which may be very righteously obeyed by every one, and it is to this precept that I would direct your attention in speaking of our new neighbours.

“ For instance, my dear girls, instead of talking nonsense about Miss Morris and her dresses, it would be much more to the purpose, if you were to turn your thoughts with a little rational gravity towards the tremendous business of this ball of ours. If we do not exert ourselves, one and all of us, depend upon it, the day will arrive before we are ready for it.”

“ What on earth do you mean, mamma ?” said the eldest Miss Knighton, knitting her brows. “ What can our talking or not talk-



ing of this girl's dresses have to do with the preparations for our ball?"

"I know exactly what mamma means, Margaret!" cried the quick-witted Louisa, "and I agree with her perfectly. If Miss Morris ever gives a ball, as I dare say she will, she would be sure to ask us to introduce some good dancing men to them, and it will be perfectly fair for us to begin by asking them to help us."

"What nonsense you do talk, Louisa!" returned the eldest sister. "Do you think it would be advantageous for us to coax Mr. Morris to bring some of the clerks of his late banking establishment to do honour to our *fête*?"

"I wish *you* did not so dearly love to talk nonsense," returned the younger sister. "I believe you know that I am as little likely to covet a contribution of bankers' clerks as yourself. But, for goodness' sake, do not let us quarrel about such nonsense! I understand what mamma meant if you do not, and I promise that she shall find me both ready and willing to assist her in every way."

"And one way, and not the least efficient,

perhaps, will be propitiating the aid of our wealthy neighbours, though not exactly in the way that Margaret suggests," said Mrs. Knighton. "As we have never yet been at any party at their house, it is only by means of a little common sense and guess-work that I can enlighten the mind of our poor, dear Margaret, as to the sort of assistance which I think they may render us. It is not bankers' clerks that we want, my dear, but bankers' silver forks, spoons, and candlesticks."

"Yes, mamma!" replied Louisa, with animation, "and both the men-servants, if you please; though the under one is hardly bigger than a tiger, nevertheless, he may be very useful, you know. And all sorts of moveable lamps, too, and candelabras. If we can't borrow, it is quite certain that we must hire; for there is nothing so detestable as half-lighted rooms."

"Nor is there any money more completely lost, than what is paid for the hire of things that walk off the next morning," rejoined her mother; adding, with an intelligent nod to her eldest daughter: "perhaps our thoughtless

Margaret begins now to understand a little what we mean, Louisa."

"Perhaps Margaret is not quite so thoughtless as you seem to suppose," returned the eldest daughter with a meaning smile. "Only set my anxious heart at rest as to the bankers' clerks, and such-like commodities, and you shall not find me either dull or indifferent, respecting any other assistance from these spick and span new people. They are, in fact, exactly the right sort of folks to borrow from, because, in the first place, all their goods and chattels are in their newest gloss, and, also, because they will undoubtedly consider that you pay them a very flattering compliment by asking for them."

"Perfectly true!" returned her mother, with an approving nod. "I thought we should all agree upon the propriety of cultivating a neighbourly intimacy with these new people, as soon as we had indulged ourselves with a few minutes of unreserved conversation on the subject. But do not let me be misunderstood by you, my dear girls. Do not fancy that in wishing to admit this poor motherless girl to some degree of friendly intimacy with us,

I am merely actuated by the idea that we may make her convenient. I owe it to myself to assure you, that I am incapable of being actuated by any such feeling. I really would not permit the acquaintance at all, if I did not believe that we, in our turn, could be useful to her. But, on the other hand, I should be most contemptibly insincere if I did not acknowledge that the advantages arising from the acquaintance would be mutual. Do you understand me, my dear children? If you do not, you cannot do justice to my motives."

"Oh, yes, mamma!" was uttered in reply by both her daughters at once; and, after the interval of a moment, Margaret added in a half whisper, "If we did not, we must be very stupid!"

This conversation was useful to all the parties engaged in it, for it caused them both to feel and to act with that sort of pleasant unity and "*ensemble*" which more effectually prevents the awkward *contresens* arising from family blundering, than all the wisdom in the world could do without it.

This unity of purpose was, indeed, most



importantly beneficial in the present instance ; for, notwithstanding the carriage, and the aristocratical connection, the family arrangements of the Knightons might be described on the whole as being rather scrambling than well ordered ; and the consequence of this was, that, upon any great occasion, like that of the coming ball, not one thing only, but pretty nearly every thing in the house and in the household was discovered to be deficient.

It would have availed them little, therefore, if any one of the family had determined from time to time to beg or to borrow from their well-supplied neighbours, what might remedy some particularly obvious want ; but when the whole amount of the triple wit and the triple wiles of the anxious mother and daughters were leagued together in perfect unison, both as to the object and the best means of obtaining it, there was little danger that they should fail.

Not many minutes after the above conversation had taken place, Miss Louisa Knighton left the room, but returned with no more delay than was necessary for the putting on a bonnet and a shawl.

"I suppose, mamma, there will be no impropriety in my running in alone to speak to Charlotte Morris, about something upon which I want to consult her, will there?" said she, drawing on a not very fresh pair of gloves, as she spoke.

"None at all, my dear," replied her mother, with a nod and a smile; "but you had better let William go with you and ring, and, of course, he will wait till the door is opened."

"Stay one minute, Louisa!" said her eldest sister. "Why should not I go with you?"

"Because it will be just wasting an opportunity if you do," replied the younger. "What is to prevent your running in an hour or two later, after we return from our drive, for instance? If we intend to profit by the hint mamma has given us, we ought *never* to waste an opportunity of running in and out, as if we were the dearest friends in the world; and if we are not fools we should never come away, just at the present time I mean, you know, without working her up about the ball, and making her understand that favourites have always the best partners, &c., &c., &c.; and then carelessly slipping in a word about

some of the hundred and fifty things which we all know we want, and which we all know they have. You have no doubt, have you, that this would produce its effects? We all know, too, that we have not too much time before us, so do not let us waste any of it by setting two at a time to do the work of one."

"Let her alone, Margaret!" said Mrs. Knighton, laughing. "She knows what she is about. You shall take the next turn, my dear, and later still, I may, perhaps, make a little free-and-easy call myself. There will be some amusement in comparing notes afterwards, and seeing which succeeded best."

Louisa only waited long enough to receive the maternal sanction, and in about two minutes afterwards she was ushered into the presence of Miss Morris, whom she found busily engaged upon what Louisa vehemently declared, was the most beautiful piece of *tattooing* that ever was seen.

CHAPTER X.

"I HOPE you do not dislike my bursting in upon you so abruptly, my dear Miss Morris," said the visitor, cordially receiving the hand which was eagerly stretched out to welcome her, "but I never treat anybody I like with ceremony."

"Then I am sure, I hope you will never treat me with ceremony," replied Charlotte earnestly, "for I should be sadly grieved if I were obliged to think that you disliked me."

"There is no fear whatever of that, my dear girl," replied Louisa, "for the fact is, you have made a conquest of the whole family *en masse*; and if you like us half as well as we like you, we shall soon be dear friends, as well as near neighbours."

"Then we *shall* be dear friends, Miss Louisa," returned Charlotte, colouring with delight. "You, who have a mother and sister, can hardly imagine what a pleasure it is to me, who have neither, to find myself accidentally brought to live almost next door to such very agreeable neighbours ; and it is so very kind of you to come in to see me, in this friendly way !"

"Then it is a settled thing between us, dear Charlotte, we are to be dear friends."

"It certainly will not be my fault if we are *not* !" replied Charlotte, with great energy. "You are all of you so amiable ! It was so kind of you to ask me to that delightful party, last night ! How beautifully your mamma plays waltzes ! It is quite a pleasure to dance to her playing."

"Are you fond of dancing, dear ?" said Miss Louisa, with rather a patronizing air.

"Yes, indeed, I delight in dancing !" returned Charlotte with great enthusiasm.

"I thought you must like it," replied her new friend, "because you dance so well. I am very fond of dancing, too ; but then, to tell you the truth, I am rather particular in the

article of partners. I really think that I had rather not dance at all, than have a partner that was not in all respects perfectly *comme il faut*."

"Oh yes! To be sure, the partner makes all the difference in the world," replied Charlotte, blushing to the very top of her forehead, as she remembered how little she knew about partners, excepting at the dancing school.

Louisa interpreted her emotion with tolerable accuracy, at least it made her still more fully aware than she had been before, that the power of bestowing a partner, was in its place and degree as valuable as that of a minister who is capable of bestowing a place; and there was all the importance of patronage in the condescending smile with which she replied: "I am glad you agree with me on that point, my dear, for I think it is very likely that I may sometimes be useful to you. Indeed, I think we may be useful to each other, my dear girl. I am sure there are a hundred ways in which you may help *me*. When we have been a little longer acquainted, you will begin to understand some of the peculiarities of our

situation, for though we are, upon the whole, very advantageously situated, and I am excessively thankful for it, of course, yet still we have our little difficulties, and I believe everybody in the world has, more or less."

"The fact about us, you see, is this. Papa is exceedingly well off, you know, as, of course, you may guess, my dear, by our keeping our carriage and all that sort of thing; but mamma, you see, is of a very high family, the granddaughter of a baronet, not created yesterday, observe, which makes an immense difference, but dates from 1611, the first batch, as, of course, you know; but you can hardly have an idea, unless you happened to belong to the same sort of set yourself, what a difference it makes in everything. For you see one is obliged to keep up a little with the people one belongs to, and the consequence is, that poor dear mamma cannot be one half so liberal to us about dress and all that sort of thing, as she certainly would be, if she were not obliged to keep up with Lady Wilcox Smith, in a hundred things that are ruinously expensive! But Lady Wilcox Smith is her own second cousin by marriage, and it would not

do at all, you know, to shrink from doing things in the same style she does, though I assure you it is often very inconvenient. Can't you understand that sort of thing, dear Charlotte?"

"Oh, yes! to be sure I can!" replied the banker's young daughter; although, with all her acuteness, she would have been puzzled to explain what it was she thus professed to understand.

"Well, then, my dear," resumed her visitor, "you will find out as we get more intimate, that if mamma was not one of the very cleverest women in the world, it would be utterly impossible for her to do all that she does do, in order to keep her place in her own set, without putting papa to inconvenience. And I do assure you that she not only does it, but does it most admirably! I don't believe the Wilcox Smiths have the least idea what papa's income is, or how much we spend. But, at any rate, we young ones have the benefit of it, and so have our intimate friends too. Mamma is quite celebrated for her manner of managing her dancing parties, for she always contrives to get such good men."

Fortunately my heroine was too well read to be puzzled by this somewhat equivocal phrase, for she never for an instant imagined that her new friend meant *worthy* men, and she therefore replied with a more intelligent smile and nod than any mere ordinary girl of her age could have put in action, "Then I am quite sure, without your saying one word more about it, that your mamma's balls are always delightful!"

"I am sure I hope you will find them so," replied Louisa. "But you must not call them *balls*, dear, they are only dances, you know. But call them what we may, they are very delightful I promise you, and so you will think too, I am quite sure, after you have become acquainted with some of our favourites."

"Oh, my dear, dear Miss Louisa Knighton, how very kind it is of you to speak as if I ever really could enjoy such an advantage! But now we are talking confidentially, I will confess to you that I hope it will not be very long before papa will let me have a dancing party at home; and if I can but make it succeed, I am sure he would not mind our having it often, for I must say he is excessively kind and indulgent in all ways."

"Well, dear Charlotte," returned the new friend, very affectionately, "I see no earthly reason why we might not between us make the London season perfectly delightful; and if we make up our minds to do it, depend upon it we shall succeed. I have already told you, with as much candour as if you were my own sister, where *our* difficulties lie, but I am quite sure that if you enjoy our dances as much as I expect, you will be ready to help us."

"Ready?" repeated Charlotte, with deep feeling, "what is there I would not do to help you?"

"And you can help us, my dear, you may depend upon that. Have you not your house full of all sorts of things that nobody can do without, but of which nobody ever has enough, except just after fitting up a new house? Now, of course, you know it is years and years since mamma fitted up her house, and the inevitable consequence is, that our things have been growing less and less, as it seems to me, every party we give. I mean the tea cups, and glasses, and plates, you know, and all that sort of commodity; and though it

sounds trifling, it often causes an immense deal of plague and trouble, I promise you."

"I can easily understand that," replied Charlotte, with all the sedateness of the mistress of a family; "and I am sure," she added, "that it is very good and kind of your mamma to go on giving so many parties, notwithstanding all the trouble it gives her."

"Yes, mamma is very kind and good indeed," replied Louisa; "and I am quite sure that you are kind and good too, my dear; and therefore it is that I feel so certain of our always being good friends together. You will be able to help us by lending a few things on our ball nights, and on our side you may depend upon it we will never have dancing, either at large or little parties, without inviting you to join us in it."

A bright glow of hope and joy suffused the cheeks of my heroine. "I am sure," she replied, eagerly, "there is nothing I would *not* do to show my gratitude for such kindness!"

"We shall get on beautifully well together, my dear!" resumed the affectionate Louisa; "I am quite convinced of that, because we

like the same sort of amusements, and because we have common sense enough to understand one another, and honesty enough to say what we wish, and what we want. You are a happy girl, Charlotte Morris—it is easy enough to see that! I don't mean to deny that it is very pleasant to have a sister, that one can consult with, and all that sort of thing; but it is very nice too, to be an only child; for in that case, of course, one is sure to get more nice things given one. Margaret and I are often obliged, I promise you, to do without many things which I am quite convinced you always have in abundance; bracelets and brooches, and all that sort of thing, you know! Poor dear mamma often says, when she sees us wear the same things over and over again, that she wishes it were as easy to buy two as to buy one; and there is no use, you know, in one sister's lending ornaments to another, for every lady knows them again in a minute. However, we manage as well as we can, and as long as we get parties enough, we make up our minds to do without a multitude of things we should like to have

“Our cousins, the Wilcox Smiths, have

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quantities of trinkets, but I am sorry to confess that I cannot say much in favour of their good nature, for they neither of them ever offered to lend us one of them, even for a single night, and great fools they are for it! You have seen them, you know, and I am sure you will agree with me that, though they look like fashionable, stylish girls, they are not in the least pretty; but, nevertheless, if they were good-natured to us, we could be good-natured to them, in the way of partners, I mean, for we know so many good men! Mamma is very particularly clever in that respect, I must say. She never sees a good dancing man anywhere, that she does not contrive, sooner or later, to get introduced to him; and then, by hook or by crook, we are sure to get him to our parties. Besides, when my brother Robert is at home, he counts for something, I can tell you."

"I did not know that you had a brother," said Charlotte, slightly colouring.

"Didn't you! how very odd!" returned Louisa, laughing. "Well, my dear, I hope it is an agreeable surprise to you; he is a very nice fellow, and is in the —— Guards. They

are to be quartered at Knightsbridge soon, and then you will be able to judge for yourself."

"It must be very pleasant, dear Louisa, to have for a brother an officer in the Guards; I don't wonder at your knowing so many gentlemen!"

"Yes," returned her friend, "it certainly is an advantage. But I must run away, my dear, or I shall stay talking to you all day, and I have got to dress for our drive. Papa never lets us keep the carriage waiting for a moment; for as he says, very truly, 'there is a great difference between having horses of your own, and hired horses.' Good bye! I hope we shall meet again soon."

And then with a very affectionate handshaking they parted, with very sincere intentions on both sides to cultivate the fellowship so pleasantly begun.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Charlotte Morris sat down on the departure of her visitor, to indulge in solitary meditation on all that had passed between them, she felt for a few minutes almost bewildered by the novelty, of her situation.

Was it indeed possible, that she,—whose greatest privilege had hitherto been to sit on the sofa in the back drawing room, by herself, and read as many novels as she pleased,—was it, indeed, possible, that she was already become a person of such consequence as to be courted by such a family as the Knightons? Was it possible that people, who kept their own carriage, and gave constant balls, and were nearly related to people of title, should talk of her as a dear, intimate friend, who might be useful to them?

Notwithstanding the delightful emotion which all this occasioned, Charlotte was not too bewildered to perceive that it was not intended she should go to all the balls, and see such quantities of "good men," and have the best partners, for nothing. But this clearness of perception on her part rather increased her pleasure than lessened it. She was not without the young girl's instinct which leads to the hope and expectation of becoming the object of a tender passion—perhaps of many tender passions; but she had other hopes and expectations, which to her were perhaps dearer still. She liked very much to believe herself well-looking, and attractive, and she did believe this, with undoubting faith; but there was, as she hoped, something in store for her, ten thousand times better than all the beauty in the world.

In a word, Charlotte Morris had already set her heart upon being a woman of fashionable consequence and intellectual influence in society.

Of all the positions she had ever read of, this was the only one which she thought worthy of her; and it was to this that she firmly resolved to direct all her efforts. In ruminating, therefore, on all that had just

passed, her thoughts ran much more on the possibility of obtaining the envied power of presiding at future balls, than on the joys attending upon the act of dancing, even with good men, at that which was immediately before her.

She made no blunders, however, when recalling the important conversation in which she had just been engaged, as to the feelings and motives of the young lady who had shared it with her. She saw to its very fullest extent, the nature of the friendship so frankly offered, and smiled with a comfortable feeling of self-approval, as she thought of the immense intellectual difference between the motives of the Knighton family in seeking intimacy with her, and her motives in seeking intimacy with them.


Their object evidently was, to borrow tea-cups and wine-glasses, and, perhaps, a brooch or a bracelet! Poor people! Their ambition went no further, their imagination reached no higher object!

How great then was the difference, how vast the interval between her motives and theirs! all they hoped for was a trifling and

temporary accommodation, or the pitiful gratification of shining for an hour in borrowed gems. But what were her objects? A life-long enjoyment of admiration, influence, and renown. She certainly was playing the higher game; she felt the superiority, and gloried in it.

Meanwhile she remembered, with considerable practical acuteness, that while contemplating the grand future result, she must not neglect the small present manœuvres by which it was to be obtained: her path seemed to lie open and obvious enough before her, yet she felt that her course along it would not be altogether without difficulties. The stumbling-block, she feared, was the opposition of her aunt; and the angry blood mounted to her cheeks, as she perceived the possibility of her being again thwarted by one whose interference she had so triumphantly got rid of, by the simple process of making the exercise of it too painful to be endured.


But Charlotte doubted if any degree of insolence, or any ingenuity of evasion on her part, would avail to deter Mrs. Buckhurst from keeping watch and ward over her honoured brother-in-law's household treasures.



Charlotte herself greatly liked the idea of having every thing about her in greater abundance and in better condition than her fashionable neighbours; but this would not have checked the generous liberality of her *lendings* for a single moment.

Even had she been sure that cups and glasses would have gone to rack, and brooches and bracelets been lost or forgotten, she would have been equally intent upon conquering all obstacles to her lending them. She well knew that her father both could and would repair the loss of such commodities; but would he, or could he, put her in the way of presiding over a fashionable circle? She well knew how to answer this query also; she well knew that he could *not*. And the first result of the long meditation which followed the departure of Louisa Knighton, was the anxiously waiting for the return of her father, that she might achieve a *tête-à-tête* with him in the library, and then and there obtain his consent to her doing what, however, she was perfectly determined that, in some way or other, she would do.

She did not wait long; and being already



upon the stairs when the house door was opened to him, he had but just time enough to hang up his hat, before her arm had taken possession of his, as he passed through the door of his sanctum.

"Well, darling!" he said, kissing her cheek, "what have you got to tell me now? You can't have had any more fine invitations, I think, for I don't exactly know where they are to come from."

"Nor I either, dear papa! There is no great chance of any such happiness as that for me at present. But yet you are quite right in fancying that I have something pleasant to tell you. I have had such a delightful visit!"

"A visit, Charlotte? Who from, my dear child? Perhaps good Mrs. Johnson has come in an omnibus all the way from Bedford Row to call upon you. Is that it?"

"Do you think, sir, I should call that a delightful visit?" she replied, with a groan. "Oh! papa, papa!" she added, "it vexes me to the heart to think how little you know me!"

"Don't vex about that, Charlotte. I shall

know you, as you call it, better and better every day," said her father affectionately. "Sit down, my dear," he added, "and tell me in what way it is that I have blundered now."

"Perhaps you have not blundered, papa," she replied; "perhaps you were only joking. But if you really did think that it would be any pleasure to me to have a visit from that great, fat, vulgar Mrs. Johnson, it would certainly be a proof that you did not know me very well. If you were not so very gentlemanlike yourself, papa, I should not dislike vulgarity, perhaps, so much as I do."

"Thank you for the compliment, Charlotte, and don't be angry with me for thinking you might like to see Mrs. Johnson. She used to be very good-natured to you, I remember, and give you sugar-plums."

"Yes, papa, I remember it; and I should be very happy now to give her a pound of snuff in return; but I cannot say that I ever wish to see either her or her sugar-plums again. Oh! my dear father! I hope you won't be angry with me, if I confess that I am passed the age of sugar-plums."

"Far from it, Charlotte, very far from it, my dear," he gravely replied. "On the contrary, there is nothing, no, there is nothing which can possibly give me half so much pleasure, as seeing you become every day more womanly and lady-like. I believe I *was* only joking about Mrs. Johnson, my dear girl; for the real truth is, that she is not exactly the sort of person with whom I should now wish to see you very intimate. But who is it, from whom you have received this pleasant visit?"

"From Louisa Knighton, papa! The kindness of that family to me is very great indeed. They all of them seem to remember that I have no mother, and, therefore, that I am more in want of female friends than other girls."

"If such be their feelings, my poor, dear child," he replied, with emotion,—“if such be their reason for being kind to you, they will find in me a hearty friend in return.”

"You are the best and dearest father in the world," replied his daughter, leaning forward and kissing him; "and if it were possible for any girl to get on well without having ladies to befriend her, I really think I should

be able to do it, because of your being so very, very kind. But the more people I see, and the more I look about me, the easier it is for me to perceive, that it *is* necessary to have some *real* ladies to give one a hint now and then ; and certainly I am a most fortunate girl in having such neighbours as the Knightons. They do seem to be so perfectly aware that I shall not be able to get on without a little help ; and one and all of them are so kindly ready to afford it, and that, too, without giving themselves the least airs, or assuming the least superiority ; so that if you had hunted London through, papa, to make a valuable acquaintance for me, you could not have succeeded better."

"And you could not please me better, than by shewing yourself grateful to them for their kindness," he replied.

"My dear, dear papa !" returned Charlotte, again kissing him, "I cannot express half the pleasure I feel at hearing you say so ! It is so exactly what I have been meditating upon myself. And there is another reason, too, for making me feel delighted at what you say, and that is, because I think we *can* be useful to them."

"How so, my dear child? I confess I don't at present see any great chance of it," said he. "We can't give them parties, you know, for where should we get a proper party to meet them?"

"All in good time, papa!" returned his daughter, gaily. "I will answer for it that you will have all your dear fatherly wishes fulfilled in time, if I am not too stupid to take advantage of the blessings which you have put within my reach. I do wish to be an honour and a credit to you, if I can; and I really and truly believe that this amiable family will enable me to be so, if any thing can. And now I have got another bit of good news for you, papa, and that is, that I think I know already how we can be really useful neighbours to them, though we are *not*, I confess, quite in a condition yet to give a fine party."

"Good news, indeed, child!" returned Mr. Morris, looking a little incredulous; "but I fear your kind will runs faster than your young head can follow it. What can you do, my dear little girl, to be useful to such fine folks?"

"*I myself, I cannot do much I am afraid,*"

she replied, "but by the merest accident I am able to guess how *you* might be useful, papa. In talking of their great ball on the 20th, Louisa said that her dear mother had almost more to think of and to do, than she would be able to get through ; and among other things she told me that, though the servants had never confessed it, they had broken several plates and glasses, and that poor Mrs. Knighton positively had not time to go and choose new sets or match old ones, so that if you would give me leave to lend her a few for the supper-table, it would be doing her a real service."

Charlotte ceased, and her father did not very promptly reply ; but at length he said, "Are you not afraid, my dear, that some of our plates and glasses might be broken too?"

"If they were, I am quite sure that Mrs. Knighton would replace them with others, papa," replied Charlotte, with a deep sigh. And then she also had recourse to that effective aid of speech, "expressive silence ;" and when she thought that this had lasted long enough to produce the desired effect, she rose from her chair, and, in a voice evidently trembling from

emotion, she said, turning at the same time to leave the room :—" I see, sir, that I have asked more than you feel disposed to grant. Depend upon it, papa, I will not repeat the request ; but neither will I ever again flatter myself with the vain hope of taking such a place in society as I believe your daughter might take, if she were permitted to employ her own common sense in using the proper means to obtain it."

For a moment Mr. Morris seemed really awe-struck by the dignified and almost solemn manner of his daughter ; but in the next, the idea of the plates and glasses suddenly recurring to him, he laughed, and looking good-humouredly in her face, as he laid his hand on her shoulder to detain her, he said, " Don't look so like a tragedy queen about it, Charlotte ! Our household plenishing is very neat and very nice, and I should not like to have it share the fate which you tell me has befallen that of our neighbour ; but I do not exactly see why this tenderness on my part for my plates and glasses should prevent your taking your proper place in society."

Charlotte returned her father's laughing


look with a steady silent gaze of very different meaning, and then she reseated herself.

"Will you listen to me, papa?" she said at length, and still with considerable solemnity of tone and manner. "The present question," she continued, "is not one of a jocose kind to me. Will you listen to me kindly, dear papa, while I speak to you very seriously about myself?"

"Can you doubt it, Charlotte?" returned her father, immediately becoming as grave as a judge.

"No, I cannot doubt it! for you are, and always have been, the most indulgent of fathers," she replied; "but I want a great, *great* deal of indulgence to-day, because I know that the thoughts, the wishes, and the hopes, which for a good while past have occupied my mind, cannot possibly have entered yours, and perhaps what I am going to say may appear as ridiculous as it is new."

"At any rate, my dear child, you may speak without any fear of being laughed at, for nothing that is serious to you can be a joke to me," he replied, in a manner which certainly betrayed no inclination to laugh. Perhaps



some vague suspicion crossed his mind, that, young as she was, some favoured partner at her first and only *grown-up* dance had, in a sudden fit of unconquerable love, requested her to bestow herself and her fortune upon him.

If this were the case, Mr. Morris must have been greatly relieved and comforted, when Charlotte, with a degree of gravity which might have befitted Hannah More, when discoursing with her favourite bishops, began as follows:—
“I believe you know, my dear father, that I pass, by preference, many of my hours alone; I believe too, that you know I am fond of reading, and that many of these solitary hours are very delightfully occupied by my books; but I am not always reading when alone——.”

“Oh! no, my dear, of course not,” said her father, interrupting her; “I know that you do a great deal of very beautiful work.”

Charlotte shook her head. “No, papa, I do not mean that!” she replied: “but even when I do work, the occupation to which I allude goes on at the same time. I think, papa—I believe I think more than most girls of my age; I think of my future existence.”

Here again Mr. Morris began to look very

grave; he naturally enough thought that by the words "future existence," she alluded to the unknown life beyond the grave.

"My dear, dear child!" he exclaimed, in a tone of profound emotion, "you are not conscious of any ailment, are you? You look the very picture of health, my dearest Charlotte; and though of course it is right for us all to prepare ourselves for a future existence, I should not like to believe that your young thoughts were too unmindful of the world in which we are at present placed. Indeed, I am afraid that you spend too many hours alone, my dear love! I really must speak to your aunt about it. She spends a great deal more time than is at all necessary, in looking about everything in the house; I really must tell her so, Charlotte. I will not have you left so many hours alone."

The face of my heroine suddenly became as red as crimson.

"Oh, my dear, dear papa!" she vehemently exclaimed: "let me beseech you to have patience with me! Let me beseech you to hear me to an end! I would not have my aunt Buckhurst sit with me one moment more than

she does at present, for any reward that you could offer me ! I have the greatest possible respect for my aunt Buckhurst, I have indeed, papa, but I can neither read, nor even think, with comfort, unless I am alone. I always feel as if she expected that I should talk ; and how am I to read, or think either, if I talk ? Indeed, indeed, papa, I think I should die if you were to make my aunt Buckhurst always sit with me."

"Don't be so vehement, Charlotte," said her puzzled father. "I have not the least wish to do that, or anything else that you desire me not to do ; but I must say, my love, that I don't like the idea of your passing so many hours in meditating upon a future state. I do not think it can be good for you."

Charlotte was greatly too much in earnest in the business she was upon to feel much inclined to laugh ; nevertheless, she could not repress a smile, as she replied, "You mistake me, dearest papa ! In speaking of my future existence, I meant my future existence on earth. I am still young enough, you know, to attach some importance to that."

"Upon my word, my dearchild, I am very glad

to hear you say so," replied her father, gaily ; "you spoke so solemnly, that you really frightened me. Now, tell me then, what it was that you were going to say about your future existence on earth ?"

Charlotte coloured, and paused for a moment, and then recommenced her confidential harangue a little less solemnly than before.

"It is very true, papa, I assure you, that I do pass many hours in thinking what sort of person I should like to be, and what sort of life I should wish to lead, when I grow from a mere girl into a woman. What I should like would be always to have just such a nice house as this, just as nicely furnished, and everything about me just as elegant and as comfortable as you have made it here. But even that would not content me, papa, unless I could contrive to make myself in some degree worthy of such a beautiful home ; and even if I could do that, it would not content me unless I had a good set of elegant and well-educated people as my friends and acquaintance. My greatest idea of *earthly* happiness, dear papa, is having to preside in such a house as this, with such a circle of friends as I have described."

Mr. Morris felt and looked delighted.

"My dearest Charlotte," he replied, "I really don't think it possible you could have said any thing more calculated to give me pleasure. The wishes you express are the exact echo of my own; and I must say, that, for a young person of your age, I don't think it possible they could have been better expressed."

"Well, then, dearest papa," she resumed, "being thus happily agreed about the object we have in view, let us hope that we shall be equally so as to the manner of obtaining it. It is impossible not to see that there are some difficulties before us. While I was still a child, and while you were still occupied by my education, in short, before we came to this house, papa, I never saw anybody, you know, in the way of acquaintance, who could be of the very slightest use in obtaining the object we have in view; but your fortunately making acquaintance with Mr. Knighton has opened a way for us, which, if it be not our own fault, will lead us to all we wish. I think that while you were playing whist there the other night, I saw more than you could do

of the style of the company. Small as they called their party, there were several people of decided fashion. Lady Wilcox Smith is a very near relation ; and that elegant Miss Herbert, Louisa Knighton told me, moves in the very highest circles.—But in order to profit as much as possible by such a lucky chance as that which has brought us acquainted with the Knightons, we surely ought to make ourselves as intimate with them as possible.”

“And so we will, my dear,” replied her father, very cordially.

“But how, papa?” replied Charlotte, mournfully ; “Before any real intimacy can be established between people,” she added, “there must be a mutual wish for it.”


“Very true, dear,” returned her admiring father, “but I can’t see any good reason to doubt that it is so in the present case.”

“To a certain degree you are right, papa,” was her answer, pronounced in a way that very decidedly shewed her to be no vain boaster when she said she *thought* a good deal ; her eye, her voice, her attitude, all bore evidence of it. “Papa,” she continued, “as much personal liking as I really feel for the Knightons,

I truly believe they feel for me. We all chat away most pleasantly together, and when people do this, evidently without an effort, they cannot, you know, feel any great *dislike* to each other. But that is no proof of the sort of intimacy which I am so anxious to establish ; nor do I believe that such an intimacy is ever established, unless each of the parties is useful to the other."

Mr. Morris looked at his young daughter both with surprise and admiration.

"Charlotte !" he replied, taking her hand in his, and gazing at her earnestly and fondly ; "Charlotte ! you are perfectly right ; and I beg your pardon, my dear, for having treated your observations so lightly. Men may be better fitted to manage the affairs of the nation than women, and I have no wish whatever to see you obtain a seat in Parliament, for instance ; but in the domestic politics of private life, I sincerely believe that the judgment of one clever woman is of more practical worth than that of a dozen men. You have my full permission, my dear girl, to accommodate the Knighton family on the present occasion, and on all future occasions of the same kind, to any



extent that you may think right and judicious; and, moreover, I shall trust implicitly to your judgment as to the manner of profiting from their wish to be useful to you in return; and I assure you, dearest Charlotte, that it is a great pleasure, and a great comfort to me, to find that I can so safely trust to your judgment."

"I shall never be able to thank you enough for all your kindness to me now, and always," she replied, with a very happy smile, "and I have only one more word to say before I leave you to enjoy your book in peace, and that one word is about my dear good aunt. If she should catch me lending a few tea-cups to our neighbours, I think her conscience would not let her rest till she had lectured me, and endeavoured to frighten you. Now if this should happen, I confess that all my pleasure would be turned into fear, for I do not like to be scolded."

"Set your heart at rest upon that subject, Miss Morris," replied her father playfully: "I feel considerable sympathy with you in your dislike of being scolded, and I will take care to prevent it, by making her understand that

whatever you do in the lending line is done with my entire approbation and consent."

A cordial kiss was the happy Charlotte's only rejoinder; and then they parted once more, as thoroughly well pleased with each other as it was possible for a father and daughter to be.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT she had not employed her eloquence prematurely, or in vain, was satisfactorily proved in the course of the following day or two.

The skilful tactics of the Knighton ladies, as displayed in the conversation between the trio, detailed in a former chapter, were immediately put in action, and little friendly runnings in of one of them at a time never failed, before the running out again, to produce some evidence of the strong inclination of the visitors to borrow, and of the visited to lend.

It was, indeed, very lucky for both parties that Charlotte had lost no time in propitiating the good-will of her father in this business, for no sooner was the first order issued by the young lady to the footman, for the first cargo

of china and glass to be conveyed from No. 4 to No. 7, than a degree of domestic agitation commenced, which nothing but the voice of indisputable authority could have calmed.

The only servant in the house with whom good Mrs. Buckhurst was on conversational (I will not say gossiping) terms, was the cook. This was, of course, in some sort a matter of necessity, for who could order a dinner without talking about it? But whatever the cause, the intercourse between them had become sufficiently familiar to permit this important functionary in the Morris household to enter the bed-room of Mrs. Buckhurst without being summoned thither; and to exclaim with, perhaps, more indignation than decorum, "Please, ma'am, I wish you'd just step down stairs for a minute or two; for if you don't, and pretty quickly too, the house may be carried out of the windows before ever you get so far as the kitchen."

"Don't speak so loud, Hannah, or you'll frighten the people in the street. For goodness' sake! what is the matter?" said Mrs. Buckhurst, gravely.

"Matter, ma'am? matter enough I think,

to make anybody speak loud, if they could speak at all. There's Miss come down from the drawing-room, and took the footman with her into the china closet, where, as you know, ma'am, everything was in such apple-pie order, and there she stands ordering him to take down dozen after dozen of all the best things, and carry them into No. 7, to be in readiness for the ball."

"I am very sorry to hear it, Hannah," replied Mrs. Buckhurst, in a tone of gentle sadness, "but it is no fault of mine, my good woman."

"But it will be your fault if you don't stop it, ma'am," returned the angry Hannah. "If you'll only just step down for one minute, ma'am, I know Miss wouldn't have the face to go on with such orders. Just think, ma'am! Them beautiful cut glasses! and the lovely gilt cups and saucers, too! I know what a ball is, Mrs. Buckhurst, if you don't."

Mr. Morris' excellent sister-in-law was at that moment in a truly pitiable state of mind. Perhaps she did not know quite so much about balls as the cook did; but, on the other hand, she was infinitely better acquainted with "The Road to Ruin." Poor woman! she had passed

many miserable years of life in watching the fearful rapidity of its descent, and her high esteem, and her truly grateful affection for Mr. Morris, made the danger which he now seemed to be in, of getting upon its slippery track, and rushing, baby-led, amidst its sloughs and pitfalls, a source of positive misery to her.

Could she have believed that any exertion of hers could have saved him from it, she would have made that exertion, even if it had involved the loss of her own position in his family. But what had passed between them in the interview which followed Charlotte's important conversation with her father, had put the whole matter before her in its true light. All the ruin which could be brought about by a reckless abandonment of glass and china to the heedless hands of their neighbours' servants, and that too, while in all the agonised hurry of preparing for, and serving at, a ball, must, and would be risked, not once only, but for ever, for ever, and for ever, as long as the two Misses Knighton remained unmarried, and their parents continued to believe it desirable that balls should be given by them.

Mr. Morris indeed had entered into no de-




tail with his harassed sister-in-law as to the particulars of what had passed between himself and his daughter ; his speech to her upon the occasion was only this :—

“My dear Mrs. Buckhurst, I wish to tell you that I have given Charlotte full and free permission to accommodate her friends, the Knightons, by lending them any thing we have which they think may be useful to them at their ball, now, and upon all future occasions of the same kind. I wish Charlotte to exercise her own judgment and her own wishes as to anything and everything she may desire to lend them. I tell you this, my dear Mrs. Buckhurst,” he continued, “because I well know how kindly careful you are about everything belonging to me, and I think your anxiety for the safety of my goods and chattels might lead you to remonstrate with your young niece upon her imprudence in trusting china and glass to the care of strange servants. But in this case, my good friend, I have no objection to the imprudence. If the things are destroyed, I will replace them. You don’t know, Mrs. Buckhurst, how very important to Charlotte the intimate friendship of such a family may be. But

you must trust to my judgment on that point. I know what I have the power of doing for her, without the help of any one, and I need not tell you that all I can do, I shall do. But believe me, my dear good friend, there is much which it is totally out of my power to achieve by any means, save and except obtaining the assistance of exactly such people as the Knights. Having said thus much, I know I need say no more. You may not quite understand all the objects I have in view, but I feel quite sure that you will do nothing to impede my obtaining them."

Mrs. Buckhurst had listened to this harangue with feelings which hovered between dismay and conscious ignorance. But nevertheless the reply she made was perfectly satisfactory. "It is only necessary for me to know your wishes, my dear sir, in order to prevent my doing any thing which might interfere with them," said she; "I wish I could prove my gratitude for all your kindness by being more useful to you. But, at least, I am capable of being obedient, if I cannot be useful."

He seized her hand, and wrung it very affectionately; "You are useful, my dear sister," he



replied eagerly, "so useful that I know not how I should get on at all without you; so don't fancy you are under any obligation to me! Depend upon it, my dear soul! the obligation is all on the other side; and now good-bye. I know you will keep your promise, and not interfere with Charlotte in any of her neighbourly transactions."

"I will, indeed, sir," was the almost solemn reply of Mrs. Buckhurst; and she so strictly kept her word, that it may be doubted if her niece ever discovered that she was aware of her inroads into the butler's pantry.

As to the unfortunate Hannah, she soon perceived that the importance of Mrs. Buckhurst in the family, great as it was, was as nothing when compared with the power of "Miss;" and this conviction on her part increased in no inconsiderable degree the facilities enjoyed by the young lady in the politic game she was playing. For the cook could make a multitude of pretty supper dishes, and Charlotte, on her very first attempt to propitiate the friendly offices of this highly-paid functionary, discovered, very greatly to her satisfaction, that the authority so confidently

vested in her by her father extended far beyond the region of tea-cups and wine-glasses.

The Knighton family, meanwhile, were not slow in perceiving the influence they had gained ; and Louisa, who was the most active agent in the business, did, on the morning of the ball, somewhat shlock, as well as startle her mamma, by entering the morning sitting-room, bearing a magnificent glass dish in her hands containing some fancy composition of confectionery, which might, as she said, have done honour to Gunter himself.

"Mercy on me, Louisa ! what have you got there ?" exclaimed Mrs. Knighton.

"It is a present to you, mamma, from that dear, good-natured creature, Charlotte Morris. I do think she is the kindest and most thoughtful girl that ever lived !"

"Of course, we cannot refuse to accept it, Louisa," said her mother, rather gravely. "Tell William to take it very carefully down stairs, and give it to the cook ; it shall be put in the centre of the principal table. And when you have done this, come back again, and let me speak to you. I dare say that upon such a day as this we shall have to wait a little for

our luncheon, and I cannot, I think, employ this waiting time better than by saying a few words to you both, on the subject of your sudden friendship with Miss Morris."

Louisa coloured a little at this exordium; nevertheless, like a wise young lady as she was, she did as she was bid without saying a word. But after shutting the door, and seating herself on her return, she ventured to open the important subject by saying, "I hope, mamma, you are not going to make any objection to our intimacy. I am sure it will be very hard upon us if you do—that is, upon Margaret and me, I mean; for I am quite sure we should never have been intimate with her at all, if it had not been for the sake of helping you about the supper-table, and all the rest of it."

"I quite understand that, my dear Louisa," replied her mother. "I am quite aware that this rapid intimacy with our young neighbour has arisen from a very laudable wish, on the part of yourself and Margaret, to help me through some of my difficulties about this terrible ball to-night."

"Well, mamma!" returned Louisa, briskly,

"I think these efforts of ours have not been thrown away. Have they?"

"No, indeed, Louisa! So far from it, my dear, that I begin to feel a little ashamed at having asked, or rather at having received, so much more assistance from these good-natured people than we could any of us have dreamed of when we first talked about it," returned her mother.

"In short, mamma," said Margaret, laughing, "your present cause of uneasiness is that *la mariée est trop belle*."

"I do not think I have complained of any uneasiness, my dear," replied Mrs. Knighton. "On the contrary, I have been spared an immense amount of contrivance and difficulty of all sorts, by the facility with which we have obtained assistance from our new neighbours; and if Louisa had not opened the discussion by anticipating complaints on my part, you would have discovered by this time that what I was going to say had a very different tendency. In the first place, my dear girls, I suspect that you do not quite understand your new friend. I greatly doubt her being so very silly, as I suspect you think her."

"No, I don't think her silly, mamma," said Louisa. "In the first place, I don't think there is anything particularly silly in her liking us; neither do I think there is anything silly in her wish to propitiate our liking in return, by showing herself willing to assist us on such an occasion as the present."

"Nothing can be more thoroughly just and reasonable than every word you have said, Louisa," rejoined Mrs. Knighton. "I shall only go a little further than you have done in penetrating the motives of this young lady for doing all that she has done. I presume that you will both agree with me in thinking that she might have very satisfactorily testified both her liking to us, and propitiated our liking in return, without letting her wish to assist us carry her one quarter the length it has done. Do you understand me, girls?"

"Certainly, mamma!" cried Margaret. "Perfectly, mamma!" cried Louisa; adding, however, that she thought the superfluity was accounted for very satisfactorily by the youth of Miss Charlotte.

"And there is precisely the point where I differ from you," returned her mother. "That

she is much younger than she looks, I am fully aware ; for her father, who is quite a sort of man to be depended on, gave me the date of her birth at full length. She still wants a few months of eighteen, yet she certainly looks very nearly, if not quite, as old as either of you. And this touches on the moral of my homily. Trust me, Miss Morris is a *very* clever girl for her age ; and a very clever girl would not throw away such a superfluity of liberality and exertion, if she did not expect to get something in return."

"Something ? And most assuredly she will get something," said Louisa. "Will she not get such a ball as she never had in her whole life before ? And do we not intend into the bargain that she should have partners for every dance ?"

"Yes, Louisa ; but, if I am not very greatly mistaken, she looks for more than that."

"Why, what on earth, mamma, do you think she wants us to do more ? She certainly does not want any aid either in dress or dressing ; for it is very evident, from her hair, that her maid is quite first-rate ; and as to her dress, you know perfectly well that, though

perhaps we have more ingenuity than she has, which may enable us to supply deficiencies in a way she would never dream of, her wardrobe is worth about half-a-dozen of ours."

"Quite true, my dear. Miss Morris requires no friendly help of any kind in the article of dress. And yet I am very decidedly of opinion, that neither her creams nor her jellies, her cups nor her glasses, her forks nor her girandoles, to say nothing of her magnificent contribution of flowers, have been bestowed upon us either from pure love of our various excellences, nor yet for the honour and happiness of being at our ball to-night, nor yet for the sake of securing a partner for every dance."

Here Mrs. Knighton paused for a moment, and her eldest daughter impatiently exclaimed, "Pray, pray, mamma, do not be so mysterious! You mean something rather important, I am quite sure; but I, for my part, am totally at a loss to guess what."

"But if you really do mean anything particular, you must please to say it at once, if I am to hear it," cried Louisa, impatiently; "for the beautiful flowers you talk of are all still

lying untouched on the back-parlour table, and we ought to be making up our own bouquets, and those for the drawing-room slabs into the bargain."

"Nevertheless, Louisa, I must request that you will listen to me for a few minutes longer," said her mother; "I will promise to be as brief as I can. TRUST ME, this young girl has a deeper and more important object in view than you give her credit for. Trust me, that it is not for the sake of getting a partner that she has been doing all she has done. She is a very clever creature, take my word for it; and what she wants from us is that we should introduce her, not to a *partner*, but to *society*. She hopes and expects that we shall get people to call on her. . . . She hopes and expects that we shall put her in the way of giving balls herself; and, what is more still, of inducing people to go to them."

"Then let her expect!" cried the indignant Margaret. "I do not expect, whatever she may do, that you, ma'am, will undertake any such Herculean labour. Mercy on us! Her father a third-rate looking person, without having a decent connection in the world! And

she expects you to place her on an equality with ourselves in society?"

"I have said nothing about equality with ourselves, Margaret. I believe she expects nothing beyond what it would be extremely easy for us to achieve. However, I am perfectly willing on the present occasion to let you have your own way, my dear girls. I know you agree so well together on all questions of this sort, that I have no scruple in referring to you both as if you were but one. It will be but fair, however, to give you one hint, or rather two hints on the subject. The first is, that I never saw your father so little disposed to furnish money for a ball as he has been this year. And the second is, that between buying and hiring, I believe your new friend has spared us the expenditure of a sum that I should have found it very difficult to obtain from him. Moreover, the money he has given has been indorsed with very disagreeable sarcasms, I assure you."

"Sarcasms, mamma? what do you mean by sarcasms?" said Louisa, colouring.

"Why, he says, my dear, that he does not see the use of it."

"How excessively spi——How excessively unkind and unfatherlike !" said Louisa, pulling out her pocket handkerchief.

"As to that, my dear, it is no use to grumble. We all know that your father *is* satirical. But on the whole, he is not a bad father, Louisa ; and at any rate, it is neither you nor I that can draw the cheques, you know. Besides, he told me yesterday, that he could not give dinners and balls too ; and I declare to you, that I think the dinners the most important of the two."

"And so do I too, mamma !" exclaimed Louisa, with great energy. "Besides, the dinner invitations need not include any one that we don't——I mean any one we do not really wish to be particularly civil to ; whereas at a ball, one *must* get partners for all the girls whose mothers give balls in return. And just upon the same principle, I think it will be perfectly right and proper for us all three to be on the *qui vive*, if we happen to see Charlotte Morris sitting down for want of a partner. But surely this is paying dearly enough for all the crockery that ever was borrowed or lent, without undertaking to make

a lady of fashion of a chit of a girl, whom nobody ever saw or heard of."

"I am sorry, Louisa, to be obliged to differ from you," replied her mother; "but the price you are willing to pay will not be deemed sufficient, unless I am very much mistaken in my estimate of Miss Morris' common sense. There is one very notorious circumstance concerning her, which you seem to overlook," continued Mrs. Knighton, gravely. "If her father does not marry again, it is quite certain that she will inherit a fortune sufficiently large to make her deficiency in the article of fashionable acquaintance at this early period of her career of no consequence at all. That it will be of very essential importance, just at present, to her to supply this deficiency, she is quite acute enough to discover; and whoever may assist her in this may command all the assistance she can render them in return. If we do this, we shall reap the benefit of it, without doing ourselves the slightest injury; for there is nothing at all objectionable in the appearance of either the father or daughter. But if we do not assist her in this way, take my word for it, girls, she will speedily find somebody else who will."

Both the young ladies listened to this statement very attentively, and it was evident that it made considerable impression on them both. Louisa, indeed, only nodded her head as she left the room, saying somewhat carelessly, "Very well, very well; I dare say it is all very true." But Margaret evidently considered the subject more seriously, and replied in the accent of a sensible person, completely convinced by a clear statement of very important facts, "I agree with you completely, dear mamma! Louisa is so childish, that she never thinks of anything beyond the present moment. It is well for her, and for me too, that we have your head to help us. I must go now and see if there is any chance of luncheon, before I set about my job in the little drawing-room. I like to see a card-room look pretty. It shows that one's whole soul is not absolutely devoted to dancing. Do you know, mamma, I sometimes think that I should like a rubber of whist myself."

"Nay, Margaret!" replied her mother with a flattering smile, "there is time enough for that yet, my dear."

Her daughter returned the smile, but said


nothing, quietly taking her way to arrange a couple of card tables in a small third drawing-room ; and had any one been very near, they might have heard her murmur, as she was thus employed, " If he does not marry again."

CHAPTER XIII.

My heroine did not return from Mrs. Knighton's ball till three o'clock in the morning ; but, late as it was, she felt nothing approaching to weariness. On the contrary, she was conscious that if she went to bed, she should not sleep, and, therefore, after submitting to have her hair put rather hastily into curling papers, and her satin and tulle dress exchanged for a dressing-gown, she dismissed her maid, and, instead of going to bed, placed herself at her writing-desk, and scribbled with a rapid pen the following pages in her diary :—

“ 21st June, near four o'clock in the morning.

“ Sleep is for the present quite out of the question. It would be easier for me to go to



sleep with a drum beating close to my ears, than with my heart throbbing as it does at this moment !

“ If any prying eye were within reach of reading these words, (the manner in which I have passed the last four hours and-a-half being known), the chances are ten to one that they would be interpreted into a confession that I had fallen deeply in love.

“ What may betide me in course of coming years, I know not ; but, at the present moment, I can say very honestly, that no feeling which could by possibility be interpreted as symptomatic of the tender passion, has any thing to do with my present disinclination to sleep.

“ The past evening, however, has been one of great excitement ; and well it might be so, since I have passed it in witnessing precisely the sort of scene, which at the present time I feel to be more interesting to me than any other.


“ When at length the time really comes for my falling in love, as come I presume it must, I doubt not that I shall look back at my present state of indifference with surprise, if

not with contempt. But while my present 'fancy free' condition lasts, my view of the love-lorn state has considerably less of respect than of pity.

"I have read too much about it not to know the symptoms. In fact, I know them well; and if I am not greatly mistaken, it is the intention of that very gentlemanlike young man, Mr. Cornelius Folkstone, to give me all the information I may want or wish for on the subject.

"To his wishes and intentions on this point I have not the slightest objection. In fact, I witness his growing passion with satisfaction, because I know that, if I were incapable of inspiring such feelings, I should also be, probably, incapable of obtaining that influence in society, upon which my heart and hopes are fixed.

"At present, indeed, I know that I am, and that I must be, ignorant of an immense deal that it will be absolutely necessary I should learn before I take the place to which my ambition points, and for which my heart yearns with a stronger feeling than, if I mistake not, any other object will ever inspire.



“Most assuredly I have been singularly fortunate in the opening of my career. How improbable should we have thought it, if we had been told, upon coming into this new neighbourhood, without knowing a single individual in it, that we should, within two months afterwards, find ourselves on terms of such perfect intimacy with such a family as these Knightons !

“Neither can it be denied that something besides mere chance has favoured us. I am to inscribe every feeling on these pages, and, therefore, I must not shrink from avowing that I consider myself as having shown considerable ability in the manner by which I have insured the invaluable assistance of these people.

“Had I failed to use my influence with my father for permission to lend his goods and chattels, or had I shrunk from spending a portion of the money allotted for myself, in obtaining flowers and so forth for them, I should no more have received an offer from Lady Wilcox Smith to call upon me, than I should have received a similar one from her Majesty the Queen.

“ I felt sure that I was pursuing the best, perhaps, under the circumstances, the only method of at once obtaining a *profitable* introduction to society. As to the two Knighton girls, they are very common-place, and not at all more likely really to like me, than I am really to like them. But the mother is a clever woman ; and new as I am to such scenes, I have at least *read* enough concerning them, to be quite certain that her society is really such as I wish to be admitted to.

“ The titles of several persons, both male and female, prove plainly enough that they are in a good set ; and, as far as appearance goes, that beautiful creature Miss Herbert, and her proud-looking brother, are no bad certificates.

“ Decidedly, I am beginning well.

“ Lady Wilcox Smith is to call as soon as she returns from Richmond ; and, moreover, Louisa Knighton told me that I am to be invited to their ball the week after next. But they can't send the invitation before they have called, it seems. Upon the whole, I think that I learnt a good deal at this my first party. I paid particular attention to Mrs. Knighton's

manner of receiving the people. There might be a shade, I suppose there *was* a shade of difference between her manner of receiving people of rank and title, and people of no rank and title. However, it was by no means very remarkable, and, I suppose, strictly speaking, it would have been more perfectly right if there had been no difference at all. I shall certainly aim at this when I begin.

“There was one thing in Mrs. Knighton that puzzled me, nor can I, with all my guessing, explain it satisfactorily. Among the company there was a married pair, by name Mr. and Mrs. Richards. The lady, if lady she is to be called, was large and coarse, but decidedly handsome. Her manners and her dress were admirably well matched—both were **FLAUNTING**. Johnson defines the verb to flaunt, ‘to make a fluttering show in apparel;’ and Mrs. Richards decidedly makes a fluttering show both in her dress and her manner of wearing it. In short, she was most decidedly a very vulgar-looking woman. Yet to this person I should say that Mrs. Knighton decidedly paid more attention than to any one else. It was a sort of coaxing attention, as if she

particularly wished to put her in good humour ; and I heard her repeatedly ask her if she would not dance, which seemed to me exceedingly absurd, for she was neither sufficiently young, nor sufficiently *svelte* to render such an exhibition of herself desirable. Mrs. Richards, however, was wise enough to decline the proposal ; and it appeared to me that the refusal disappointed Mrs. Knighton. My curiosity being awakened by seeing so much marked attention bestowed upon a person to whom, from her appearance, I could scarcely think it was due, I pointed her out to one of my partners, and asked him if he knew her name. ‘Oh, certainly, I do,’ was his reply ; ‘that is Mrs. Richards.’

“‘And who is Mrs. Richards?’ I replied, playfully ; for I felt certain that there was something ridiculous about her, and I wished to encourage him to tell me what it was.

“But instead of doing so, he stared at me exactly as he might have done, if I had asked him why Mrs. Knighton thought it necessary to have lights in her drawing-room.

“‘Who is Mrs. Richards?’ my dear young lady,’ he replied, laughing, ‘upon my word

I know not how to answer you, except by saying that Mrs. Richards is the wife of Mr. Richards.'

" 'That is certainly very satisfactory,' I replied, laughing in my turn; although I felt myself blush at the evident blunder I had made, by being ignorant of what it was obvious every body ought to know. But I rallied my courage by recollecting that as long as I had my *unsunned* youth to plead for my excuse, even ignorance would appear becoming and graceful. I therefore playfully shook my head, and replied, 'I clearly perceive that not to know Mr. Richards argues myself unknown; but one may be forgiven for being both unknowing and unknown, at one's first *début*. This is my first real ball, and I therefore know nobody; it will indeed be quite a charity to enlighten me.'

" 'And I can imagine no task more delightful,' he gallantly replied; 'and I will begin by honestly telling you, that nothing but your charming plea of youth, and unsophisticated innocence, could excuse your not knowing Mr. Richards. His works I am quite sure you must know: Mr. Richards is a celebrated portrait-painter.'

“ ‘Is that showy lady only the wife of a portrait painter?’ I exclaimed with more *naïveté*, I suspect, than *tact*, for my handsome partner, Mr. Wilson, laughed in a manner rather too genuine, I thought, to be flattering. However, he immediately replied—‘Oh! I understand you perfectly, and I am by no means astonished at your astonishment. By the time you have added another lustre to your experience, my dear young lady, you will have discovered that there are many and various claims for fashionable notoriety. Mr. Richards is certainly rather above par as a clever painter of portraits, but his fashionable notoriety does not arise from that.’

“ ‘From what does it arise?’ said I, looking innocently in his face, but determined with all my innocence to find out *why* Mrs. Knighton paid more attention to his vulgar wife than almost to any other lady in the room.

“ ‘More from his caricatures, I think, than from his portraits,’ replied my partner, nodding his head as he spoke, with an air of great intelligence.

“ ‘Do you mean that he draws caricatures of the people he meets in society?’ said I. ‘Do you mean that he wins his way to fame and

fashion, by handing to one set of his friends, grotesque likenesses of another set ?' I added with very genuine astonishment.

" 'Something like it,' he replied, laughing. 'People in general are very fond of seeing good caricatures of their friends.'

" 'People in general,' said I, rather gravely, 'may be, and I believe are, rather too fond of quizzing one another ; but yet I should scarcely think that a portrait-painter would be able to arrive at any very profitable degree of success if he trusted more to the absurdity than to the truth of his likenesses.'

" 'A very rational and a very natural idea, Miss Morris,' was his answer. 'But the sort of success attained by Mr. Richards, and shared, as you perceive, by his showy wife, may, I suspect, be partly, though not wholly, derived from fear. It is better to stand well with an artist of this description than not ; especially if, as is said to be the case in the present instance, his caricatures are *sold*.'

" 'Sold ?' I repeated in dismay, 'Do you really believe that party-giving people would invite Mr. Richards and his wife, expressly because there is a good chance of getting them-

selves and their friends into the window of a caricature-shop?’

“ ‘Not themselves, Miss Morris. Generally speaking, all persons escape, whose parties are really worth going to, and who are sufficiently kind, flattering, and attentive to Mr. and Mrs. Richards and their two children, to propitiate a friendly exemption from such notice. But there is moreover another reason,’ he added, ‘why people covet the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Richards at their parties : Mr. Richards has a knack of rhyming extemporaneously, and of delivering the said rhymes, for I can scarcely call it singing them, to pretty nearly any popular air that he can get some lady or other to play for him. This certainly is no very *original jeu d’esprit*, inasmuch as it was done in days of yore, our seniors tell us, much better than it is likely to be done again ; yet, nevertheless, this rhyming facility is often found wonderfully useful. You have no idea how it helps on a dull evening.’

“ ‘I can easily imagine that it may be so,’ I replied.

“ ‘Enough so, believe me,’ he resumed, ‘to

obtain him a great many more dinner invitations in a week than there are days ; and there certainly is some talent shewn in the manner in which he rhymes off his ridicule upon the absent, and his compliments upon the persons present,' continued Mr. Wilson : ' but this is all quite fair. The worst thing that I know of him, is the selling his caricatures, and then *pledging his honour* that he is perfectly innocent of the fact.'

" All this was very interesting to me, and though I flatter myself that I contrived to look as if I gave no very deep attention to anything he said, I treasured every word ; and most certainly I shall contrive to be properly introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Richards before we begin to give regular parties.

" *Au reste*, Mrs. Knighton's beautiful ball was, from first to last, most delightful ; for not only was I flattered and amused even more than I had hoped to be, but I am conscious that I am come away instructed as to many things of which I was before perfectly ignorant. Lively pictures of society, as given us in novels, are beyond all doubt extremely useful, but they can never awaken the judgment to the same degree of

practical observation which is produced by looking on the living scene.

“Long before I had left the rooms, I had acquired a variety of perfectly new ideas. I saw much that I immediately determined to adopt in style and manner, and much that I immediately determined to avoid.

“There is little or nothing to be complained of in Mrs. Knighton’s style of moving about among her guests, but I strongly suspect that if I were receiving as many people in a room of my own, and moved about as much among them as she did, I should see more than she saw; and I’ll answer for it too, that whatever I saw, I should, in some way or other, turn to account.

“She was certainly very smiling and very courteous to everybody; but, somehow or other, it seemed to me that she did not pay as much marked attention to that elegant Miss Herbert and her dignified-looking aunt as I should think they were used to receive; for both the brother and the aunt of the beauty looked so reserved and so proud, that I cannot help thinking they must be people of consequence.

“Notwithstanding my calling Mr. Herbert *old*, I certainly think that he was the handsomest man in the room; and though I should

not wish to fall in love myself for the next two or three years, I should not be at all sorry if he were to follow that inflammable Mr. Folkstone's example, and follow me about with his eyes, as he does. Mr. Herbert has remarkably fine eyes, though still I don't think he looks quite like a young man, and it seems absurd to think about the beauty of anybody's eyes if they are not young. I suppose I have done so in this case, because the eyes of the brother and sister are so much alike. By the by, I did not leave the rooms till I had solved the mystery of the great difference in age between the two. They are both the children of a certain very brave Colonel Herbert, who was at the battle of Waterloo, but not by the same mother.

"Colonel Herbert and his second wife, Louisa Knighton told me, both died soon after this daughter was born, and the brother and aunt together have supplied their place to the beautiful girl. But Louisa says that she believes that they are none of them very rich.

"If he were of a more suitable age for me, I dare say he would have found out by this time that I am likely to have nearer two than one thousand a year; and there is no exaggeration in this, for papa never exaggerates, and he told

me so himself. But, of course, this grave-looking gentleman would be too wise, if he did know it, to fancy that a girl of my age would ever think of marrying a man so very much older.

“There were more ladies of title than gentlemen of title.

“Margaret Knighton said that it was because the Houses of Parliament were sitting. Sir William Wilcox Smith, however, was there, though I did not see him myself, for he was playing whist all the evening ; but there was another baronet, called Sir George Henderson, who, I think, was decidedly the proudest and most stately-looking personage I ever beheld ; and I suppose the most flattering adventure, which happened to me during the evening, was the having his son and heir introduced to me for a partner.

“I am quite sure Mrs. Knighton intended it as a particular compliment, for both the Knighton girls, as well as herself, said to me, after the quadrille was over, ‘I hope, my dear, you know whom you have been dancing with ?’ And when, upon the question being first asked, I replied in the negative—the information that

it was no less a person than the son and heir of Sir George Henderson was given in such a crowing tone of pomposity, that it was easy to perceive that they thought I had been greatly honoured ; and had they all three, or any one of them, been making up a balance-sheet between us, I am quite sure that this introduction would have been set down as an equivalent for the loan of six dozen silver forks at the very least.

“ And if it be so, I have assuredly no right to complain, for it is precisely the sort of coin that I hoped to be paid in.

“ As I did not see any symptom that the future baronet was likely to fall in love with me, I should have been better pleased (in the way of doing business) had it been his lady mother instead—but she was not there. I asked Louisa Knighton why she did not come with the gentleman, and she told me she was in very delicate health, and seldom or never went to balls.

“ But, before I came away, I think I found out a secret about these fine Henderson people.

“ Though as yet I have seen but little, and know but little about affairs of the heart,

I should not mind betting three to one that Mr. Frederic Henderson is in love with Miss Catherine Herbert. My having taken this into my head will give me an interest in watching them. If I prove right in this, I shall begin to have some confidence in my own powers of observation ; but if I am right, that pretty Miss Herbert, and her lover too, have got some up-hill work before them, for I am quite sure Louisa Knighton spoke truth when she said the old baronet was reckoned one of the proudest men in London. He really looks, as he marches across the room, as if he thought the earth was not quite worthy of the honour of being trod upon by his sublime footsteps.

“ Poor, pretty Miss Herbert ! without any fortune at all, I believe ; what chance can she possibly have ? It really is very melancholy. Before the evening was over, I got introduced to this beauty. Mr. Knighton himself led me to the supper-table—(payment, of course, for sundry dozen silver spoons)—and it so happened that Miss Herbert and her partner, Mr. Henderson, were standing next to us—and then it was he introduced me. It was before this that I had danced with Mr. Henderson, and

so we all began talking as if we had been old acquaintances ; she looked exactly the sort of girl to do for a heroine—so gentle, as well as so beautiful ; but I do not feel at all certain that I should like her particularly : she looks too shy for any one to say that she gave herself *airs*, and yet I felt as if she would not choose a new acquaintance to be too intimate with her ; but, of course, after what Louisa had told me about the whole Herbert set, I did not care a farthing for that. She can never do me any good in any way, though I should like, when we do begin to have balls at home—which papa says is to be next year—I own I should like then to have her ; for I have read over and over again that it is the fashion to have beauties, and as I never intend to take my place in the world of fashion as a beauty, she may do me good, and can do me no harm.

“ If I can manage to get myself recognised as the possessor of fortune, fashion, and talent, I shall be perfectly satisfied with my lot.

“ And now, if I do not intend to be in a high fever to-morrow, I must go to bed.”

The above extract from the journal of my heroine may suffice to put the reader in pos-

session of her state of mind and feelings at the time it was written. She did not show the pages to her father, as from the first hour in which she had conceived the project of keeping a journal she had resolved that, as long as she was alive, it should be seen by no one; for, with her usual good sense, she felt convinced that unless she made and kept this resolution, she should for ever feel such a restraint upon her pen as would rob the record of all its value, as a means of showing to herself in after-years what had been the gradual progress of her judgment and opinions, while its interest, as a genuine picture of an intelligent mind in its gradual development from youth to age, would, in like manner, be destroyed for the many who, she flattered herself, would study it when she should have passed away to another state of existence.

But though Charlotte Morris had determined, upon principle, not to show her diary to her father, she was very far from wishing to keep him in ignorance of her progress in society.

She felt that upon many points there was too much sympathy between them to render

such concealment in any way necessary, or in any way desirable; and his general conduct towards her, especially in the recent instance of suffering her to do everything she wished, for the purpose of propitiating their important neighbours, convinced her that she was much more likely to lose than to gain by keeping him in ignorance either of her projects or her adventures.

It was, therefore, with all her lively recollections, and all her lively observations respecting her last night's adventures on her lips, that she followed her father to his study on the morning after the ball. He evidently listened with great delight to every word she uttered; laughed heartily when she ventured to quiz the dress of some, and the awkwardness or ugliness of others; and paid a very satisfactory degree of attention to every remark which tended to elucidate her own notions as to what ought to be done, and what she should like to do, when the happy hour arrived when she should be called upon to receive company, and select for her favourites those who should best satisfy her judgment, or please her taste.

At length, after she had told him everything

she wished to tell, she rose from her chair, and added, with an affectionate kiss upon his forehead, "But remember, papa, that if I go on telling you all my secrets, it must be upon the express condition that you repeat them to nobody. To nobody, remember! Nobody in the whole wide world!"

"You may trust me, my darling!" he cordially replied; adding, however, rather timidly, "But I suppose your dear, good aunt may be sometimes an exception, may she not? I shall enjoy making her laugh at some of your good stories."


Charlotte clasped her hands together, and looked as if she were frightened to death. "My aunt, papa? As if she were not exactly the very last person alive, to whom I would open my heart in the way I have been doing to you! It is not that I don't love her and respect her excessively. Indeed, indeed I do, papa! I should be most ungrateful if I did not; but just fancy the difference between her and you! There is not a word I can say, or an anecdote I can tell, that you do not understand and enter into just as I do myself. But tell me honestly if you think, with all her good-

ness and kindness, she would understand all my childish little stories as you do? No, papa! no! I must insist upon fair play. If you think it necessary that I should repeat to my aunt Buckhurst all that I tell you, I must change the style of my gossiping altogether. So tell me, once for all, whether you will accept my terms, and be my sole confessor as long as I remain Charlotte Morris?"

"Why, I suppose I must, you little witch!" replied her father, laughing; "for I certainly cannot submit to give up your good stories on any account whatever."

And so perfectly well pleased did he look as he made the bargain, that his sharp-witted daughter was at no loss to perceive the pleasure it gave him to believe himself her sole confidant.

Nor was he deluded in this belief; for if he was not told exactly all the plots and plans which were concocted in her busy brain, he knew a vast deal more of them than any other mortal did. And what could the most anxious father hope for more?



CHAPTER XIV.

THE next year of my heroine's life was by no means idly spent ; but the events of it would not be interesting in detail, inasmuch as it was a period during which, by mutual consent of both father and daughter, they were rather preparing for the future, than exhibiting any outward and visible signs of activity in forwarding the projects they had formed.

The wisdom which had dictated to both the postponement of her sitting at the head of her father's table, till she had acquired a little more experience in the mysteries of presiding, did not forsake them when canvassing the possibility of their giving an evening party, before they left London for a summer excursion.

"I really think, my dear Charlotte," said

the ambitious father, in one of their frequent back-parlour *tête-à-têtes*, "I really think we should find no difficulty whatever in collecting people. It is quite clear that the Knighton family would, one and all of them, do anything you wished in the way of inviting company. Shall we make the attempt, Charlotte?"

"No, papa!" replied Charlotte, in a tone of very firm decision, "I beg you not to think of it. Instead of giving me pleasure, it would give me pain in many ways."

"Then certainly, my dear, it will not be done," was his rejoinder. "Only let me know what you wish, my opinion of your judgment is such, that I have no scruple in promising that I will comply with it."


"I trust you will never be disappointed in me!" she replied, with becoming energy. "All I wish at present, dear papa, is to go somewhere or other to the sea-side for the autumn, and when we return, I daresay you will like to give one or two of your nice little dinner-parties. Let this go on with my aunt at the head of the table till the end of January, when I shall complete my nineteenth year; after my

birthday I should like you to invite another gentleman dinner-party, and then, if you see no objection, I should like to make the experiment of sitting at the head of the table myself. If I find that I can preside there without pain to myself, or mortification to you, I should like to repeat the experiment two or three times ; and then, if we were both of us contented with the result of these trials, I should like to invite the whole of the Knighton family, and two or three gentlemen to meet them. We should soon find out from Mrs. Knighton and the girls, whether I made any great blunders."

"Excellent !" exclaimed her delighted father. "Your judgment is of age already, Charlotte ! If everything goes off well on this occasion, you may go on as fast as you like, my dear. I have a notion that you won't want much help from any body."

"I hope so too, papa. I don't think I am very easily frightened, and that I believe is the great thing."

The result of this most satisfactory conversation was the following out in practice the plan thus laid down in theory. The summer



and autumn months were passed partly in travelling through the most picturesque parts of Wales, and partly in the enjoyment of sea-breezes and sea-bathing at Brighton.

They returned to London about the middle of November, but the West-end of London had not yet received back its population ; and for the next month or two Charlotte Morris and her maid were employed with exemplary cleverness and industry, in so arranging the wardrobe of my heroine, as to send her to the fashionable chapel, which she attended, with very great neatness, and even elegance of toilet, but without in any single instance having recourse either to dress-maker or milliner.

The enlarged prospects of the great future made the great realities of the actual present appear so insignificant, that the average portion of six pounds a-year instead of sixty, would greatly more than have sufficed to purchase every article of dress for which Charlotte would have been willing to draw forth her purse. Nay, even the pretty house in which she dwelt was not permitted to exhibit its beauties unveiled to the autumn sun. " For what did it signify how any thing looked then ?"

But Time and the hour faithfully performed their accustomed task, and Charlotte Morris awoke at last, and found herself nineteen.

Her father remembered the eventful day as punctually as herself; and when he took her hand and drew her towards him to receive the congratulatory kiss, he placed in it a delicate little purse, containing ten golden sovereigns, and whispered in her ear, "That is to buy trimming for your dress at your first dinner-party."

Mrs. Buckhurst had been informed, with all due solemnity, of the important change in the household arrangements which was to take place on that day; and the two ladies of the family changed places both at the breakfast and dinner-table with some little formality, but the most perfect good-humour on both sides. The initiatory gentleman-dinner-parties which had been projected, followed to the number of four, with entire success; and then came the great and important experiment of receiving the whole Knighton family with the exception of the son, who was not as yet quartered, according to promise, in Knightsbridge barracks.

That every thing might be perfectly well-regulated on this important occasion, three gentlemen, members of the club, and, therefore, known to Mr. Knighton, were invited to meet them, making the entire party amount to ten, and having an equal number of ladies and gentlemen.

The acceptance of this comprehensive family party invitation by the Knightons had not been accorded without a good deal of discussion on their part.

"Mercy on me, mamma!" had Miss Margaret exclaimed, on reading the note, when it was tossed to her by her mother. "I hope and trust that you won't make a point of my answering in person at this roll-call." And as she said this, she passed the fragrant little document to her sister.

Now Miss Louisa had long ago constituted herself Charlotte Morris's friend *par excellence*, for which amiable warmth of feeling she had many substantial reasons, and was not without substantial reward. She therefore,

fastening her eyes upon the paper, immediately declared it to be her intention to accept of the invitation, adding, as in duty bound, that



she had no doubt it would be a very "nice party."


"A very nice dinner, perhaps, you mean," replied Margaret. "Papa has more than once pronounced a favourable judgment on the banker's cook; but as to *nice* in the article of guests, I have doubts; and, therefore, I shall devote myself to my embroidery and my studies on Monday next, the 24th."

"I don't think your father will be pleased if you refuse to go, Margaret," said Mrs. Knighton, gravely.

There is a riddle, which is, I believe, allowed universally to be very witty, but which finds more cordially approving smiles from youthful maidens, than from maidens not youthful. The composition runs thus :—

"I am not what I was, but quite the reverse,
Yet I am what I was, which is very perverse;
And all the day long I do nothing but fret,
While wishing to be what I never was yet."

Now the feelings suggested by this painful statement ought to be very agreeably modified to the class of fretting females indicated, by the reflection that they are NOT, as erroneously described, in the perverse condition




complained of; they are *not* just what they were, in any sense; and both the Miss Knightons, but especially the elder, knew this perfectly well, and took care that their papa and mamma should know it too. In a word, Miss Knighton, senior, who had now just attained her thirtieth birth-day, had gradually, quietly, but very effectually, emancipated herself from all those minor matters in the code of filial obedience, which seem, like many other commodities, to wear out by long use, and to be thrown aside like all other worn-out articles.

In short, Margaret Knighton no longer deemed it her duty to go to the left, because either her papa or mamma told her to do so, if she herself happened to prefer going to the right; and, therefore, it was that when Mrs. Knighton said, gravely, "I don't think your father will be pleased if you refuse to go, Margaret;" Miss Margaret only replied jocosely, "Do you think so, ma'am?" In return to this short sentence (which was perfectly well understood), Mrs. Knighton only breathed a sigh; whereupon, her eldest daughter hummed a tune, and walked out of the room.


Mr. Knighton, however, upon hearing of the invitation, seemed rather indifferent as to who else might choose to accept it, so that nothing prevented his doing so himself; and it must be confessed, that this fact no sooner became apparent, than it struck his daughter Margaret that, after all, she thought she should like to go too, just for the fun of seeing how that long-legged chit of a girl would do the honours upon so solemn an occasion as a real dinner-party. And no sooner did this thought strike her, than she expressed it; upon which her father, contrary to the expectation of his lady, observed that they could not all go, "for that it would be positively cruel."

"Positively very kind, papa!" said Louisa, who, perfectly capable of answering for the real sentiments of the Morris family, performed her part as friend *par excellence* in a manner well suited to remove all scruples. "I have talked the matter over with Charlotte, and nothing can be more rational than all her notions about it. This is the first dinner-party they have had (since she was considered old enough to sit at the head of the table), to which ladies have been invited, and she



would not let any be invited now, but ourselves. Poor, dear girl! she knows we have been kind to her, and I must say that her gratitude to us all shews an excellent heart! I think it would be perfectly cruel if we refused to go."


"As to your notion, Louisa, of dining with Morris out of pity, I must assure you, that it is altogether a mistake. Take my word for it, there are very few private gentlemen who give such excellent dinners as he does; and this is a sort of fact which becomes known with wonderful celerity; and, though ladies do not put themselves on an equality with gentlemen in the article of eating, I have never heard any of them find fault with a dinner-party, where the table was as perfect as it is at Morris'. Besides, the fact is, that, where the dinner is really good, you will not often find the company very bad. The character of a man's cook is often, I believe, considered as being of more importance on such occasions than his own; and people will contrive to get acquainted with him, solely in the hope of being invited to dinner. Therefore, my dear ladies, I do not think that there is the least necessity for



you to tax your good-nature, in going to dine with our neighbour, if you do not like it."

This long harangue produced very considerable effect. The moment Miss Margaret discovered that no influence was to be used to induce her to go, she became quite determined that no influence should induce her to stay away. This resolution was of a nature which required no further motive to confirm it; but had the case been otherwise, Miss Margaret would, after what had passed, have kept her purpose of dining with "the Morrisises."

No experiment ever succeeded better than did this trial dinner; everybody seemed pleased, and, in fact, everybody was pleased. How much of this success belonged to the handsome house, and its handsome furniture; how much to the good cook, and the good dinner upon which her talents were displayed; how much to the amiable temper of the guests, or how much to the talents and graces of the receivers, it boots not to say. In one word, the party, from its beginning to its close, was exactly everything that it was intended to be; and what was more important still, there was not one of the seven guests who felt the least



disposed to find fault with anything they saw, with anything they heard, or with anything they tasted ; and this is really saying a great deal for my heroine's first dinner party.

Very fortunately for her, the three Knighton ladies were engaged to an evening party, and she was thus spared the painful task of having to entertain three ladies of one family, who had nothing whatever that they wished to say to her, while on her side, she had nothing whatever that she wished to say to them ! This was, indeed, an immense relief.

Of the three gentlemen invited to meet the Knighton family, two were excellent, and very gentlemanlike whist players, whom Mr. Morris had repeatedly met at the house of his neighbour ; and their perfect contentment, after the excellent coffee had duly made its entrances and its exits, was therefore placed, as much as human means could ensure it, beyond the reach of accidents from the moment the card table and its appurtenances were displayed before them.

The other was a young man, who having requested an introduction to Mr. Morris, after dancing with his daughter at the

Knighton ball, had subsequently met him, and called upon him, at Brighton; and he too, being engaged to an evening party, soon made his bow, and disappeared.

My heroine and her pains-taking aunt also then felt that their day's work was over, and that they might go to bed, and go to sleep if they liked it. This conviction came upon them both very pleasantly, though not with an equal keenness of pleasure, or an equal degree of thankfulness for the relief.

Mrs. Buckhurst, indeed, was in some degree accustomed to the agreeable feeling consequent upon knowing that her day's work was done, but not so her more luxuriant niece; now however, this niece also had the great satisfaction of knowing not only that her day's work, (and a very important day's work it was) was done, but that it was well done also, and she quietly retreated from the drawing-room, and laid herself on her pillow to rest, with the delightful consciousness that she had taken a long step onward, and upward in existence, and that she could never, never, never again find herself in the same unimportant position which she had held yesterday!

CHAPTER XV.

NOR did Charlotte Morris in any degree delude herself, when forming an estimate of the importance of her present position, as compared with what it had been before she had presided at her first dinner party. The greatest proof of this perhaps might have been found in the tone in which this party was discussed at the Knighton breakfast-table, on the following morning.

“What a farce Mr. Morris, and his daughter too, must have been playing for the last year or two!” said Mrs. Knighton. “I no more believe that Charlotte is only nineteen, than I believe I am only eight-and-twenty.”

“Nor I either, mamma!” eagerly returned Margaret. “I have all along been quite

certain that she was a great deal older than she chose to confess. Don't you think so at the bottom of your heart, Louisa? Though I suppose you will have some little scruple in confessing it, on account of your very, very particular friendship."

"Not at all, Margaret," replied the younger sister; "it may be that you are right, without its being any fault of hers; it is her father's doing, you may depend upon it. I dare say he thought, good man, that she would be all the safer for being kept back a little."

"And if it be so," observed Mr. Knighton, nodding his head very sagaciously, "I am by no means sure that our good neighbour is not right. If she owned to twenty, instead of nineteen, I should still say that she was a remarkably clever girl of her age; her manners are quite those of a full-grown woman; there is no symptom of shyness or timidity of any kind."

"That is quite true," said Mrs. Knighton; "I never saw such a nineteen in my life."

"All quite true," joined in the friend *par excellence*, "only I don't see the good of telling any untruth about it. Even supposing she is

twenty, instead of nineteen, she would still feel too young, I should think, for either the father or daughter to be ashamed of her age."

"You don't see the thing exactly in the same light as I do, Louisa," said Mr. Knighton; "I think I have a sharper eye than you have, my dear, for judging a man's income by his style of doing things; and my opinion is, that your new friend, Miss Charlotte Morris, will have a very tempting fortune if her father does not marry again; and when a man knows that there is such a bait as that to get a young lady speedily married, he is not much to be blamed if he tries to keep her back a little."

"Well, I suppose that is the reason for it," rejoined Margaret; "but after watching her as I did yesterday, nothing will ever persuade me to believe that she is only nineteen."

"But why, papa, should you suppose that Mr. Morris is so very rich?" said Louisa.

"Would he not keep a carriage?" added Margaret, recurring to the favourite feature of their own not very consistent establishment.

"I don't know that keeping a carriage is any very particularly clear proof of a man's being at ease in his circumstances, though it

may be of his wishing to live at peace in his house," replied Mr. Knighton, with a sound a little like a sigh, and a look a little like a smile; "but I can tell you what is a proof of it:—when everything you see, and everything you touch, and everything you eat, and everything you drink, is exactly the very best and most costly of its kind—all this being accompanied by strong presumptive evidence that it is paid for—then I, for one, begin to feel a strong persuasion that I am in the house of a wealthy man."

"Oh, dear yes," said Mrs. Knighton, in a tone of great decision. "You may depend upon it, girls, that your father is right on that point; you are neither of you babies, I know; but as you don't happen to be married yet, you are not likely to understand such symptoms quite as well as we do."

"No, not quite," rejoined Mr. Knighton, with a rather expressive nod. "As to the young lady's age," he added, after the silence of a few seconds, "I don't think it much signifies in any way; I should think she was of an age to be just about as attractive now, as she ever was, or ever will be."

"Yes, I think so too," responded his wife ; and then there was another pause.

"You have had no letter from Robert, have you, since the one in which he told us that his regiment was to be very soon in Knightsbridge barracks?" resumed the gentleman.

"Yes, papa, I have," said Louisa ; "I had a letter from him the day before yesterday. I thought I had mentioned it."

"Did he say anything about the time of coming?" enquired her father.

"Yes, papa—that is, he said quite positively that they should come soon—but he did not mention the exact time."

"No, he did not, but the paper did," said Mrs. Knighton ; "the newspaper stated positively that they were coming directly."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Knighton ; "of course, we shall all be delighted to see him And it would be no bad thing, Louisa, if he were to take as great a fancy to this Miss Charlotte as you have done. All joking apart, ladies, I do assure you that it would be exceedingly convenient if an odd score of thousands were to fall into his pockets from our new friend's hoards. He would then

be able to pay his own debts with vastly less difficulty than I shall be able to pay them for him."

"Good gracious, papa!" exclaimed Louisa; "I always thought that you expected Robert to marry somebody of good family, who might help him on in his profession."

"I may have wished such a thing, Louisa," he replied; "but although it may not be discreet for unmarried ladies to talk of the age of a younger brother, I don't suppose that we can any of us really forget that Robert was seven-and-twenty his last birthday."

"At any rate, papa," replied Louisa, colouring, "he is not *my* younger brother."

"Isn't he?" replied her father, laughing. "Well, so much the better, my dear—I really forgot that; but, at any rate Margaret is his senior, and I have no doubt that she has acquired wisdom enough by this time to agree with me in thinking that it would be a capital good thing, if Robert were forthwith to win the heart and hand of Mr. Morris's young daughter."

Margaret only replied by a silent bow; but her mother said, "The greatest objection I

should see to such a marriage is the obvious possibility, not to say probability, that Mr. Morris himself might take it into his head to marry. What should prevent her father's marrying again, Mr. Knighton?"

"Nothing that I know of, certainly," he replied; "and most assuredly I should in that case feel considerably less disposed to welcome Miss Charlotte as a daughter; but at present, you know, the father and daughter would start fair, and if the daughter reaches the matrimonial goal first, there might be settlements made of so satisfactory a nature as to prevent any danger from the subsequent espousals of her papa."

"Well, we shall see," said Mrs. Knighton, with an air half meditative, half jocose. "As far as I am concerned," she continued, "I should not have the least objection to Robert's marrying the heiress of all the fine things we saw yesterday, and all the banking gold owned by their owner. My baronet cousin's daughters would neither of them suit him so well."

"Decidedly not, my dear," replied Mr. Knighton, resuming his newspaper. And so the discussion ended.

There was, however, at least one of the party who did not forget it. The phrase which had more than once reached her ear, when the future prospects of Miss Morris were under discussion, seemed to rest there. Again and again, when Margaret Knighton was enjoying the solitude of her own room, did she still seem to hear the phrase, "*If her father does not marry again.*"


She felt that there was more than one image suggested by this phrase. It certainly suggested, as it was intended to do when she heard it, the idea of Miss Morris, triumphant as she now appeared in her unchecked hopes of heirship, under the very different aspect of a disappointed step-daughter, with a tolerably blooming, and particularly well-dressed step-mother before her, in full and undisputed possession of all those particularly good things belonging to this transitory life, the enduring possession of which Miss Charlotte seemed so confidently to reckon upon for the term of her natural life : in short, for as long a period of her existence as it was at all worth her while to possess them.

But though the self-satisfied Miss Charlotte

did seem so confidently to reckon upon the continuance of these blessings, it did not, upon reflection, appear to Miss Margaret that she had any good right for taking it for granted, as she evidently did, that her papa never would and never could marry again.

“Why should he not marry again?” murmured Miss Margaret to her solitary self; “older men, and much less agreeable men, marry by hundreds every day, and why should not Mr. Morris marry like other people?” This was all that Miss Margaret said to herself on the subject upon that occasion, at least it was all that she said distinctly; but thoughts more or less connected with this train of reasoning seemed to have taken a strong hold on her imagination.

It can scarcely be doubted that the demeanour which had appeared to the Knighton family so discreet, and in every way proper, as to seem almost preternaturally correct in a girl of my heroine’s age,—it cannot be doubted that this demeanour, in the eyes of her father and her aunt also, must have been very highly approved. It certainly, to say the least of it, merited approbation, and it certainly obtained




it. In Mr. Morris the feeling produced by the perfect propriety and *aplomb* of his young daughter partook largely of admiration as well as approval; in Mrs. Buckhurst, it was mixed with wonder. But in both the practical result was precisely the sort of success which Charlotte most wished to obtain, for to both it had made evident the important fact, that she was perfectly capable of presiding at her father's table with propriety. Mr. Morris would have added, perhaps, the epithet of grace; Mrs. Buckhurst, certainly, that of confidence.

Her own opinion of the result of this experiment shall be given in her own words, copied from her diary:

"The important experiment has been made, and I have not been found wanting in any of the requisites necessary for the fulfilment of the task which I have set myself.

"As long as I have been capable of forming a wish for the future, that wish has been to find myself precisely in the situation which I have filled this day; and if my wishes had ever taken a more defined shape, that is to say, if I had ever sketched and dramatised to,

myself the precise manner in which I wished to perform the part that I so ardently hoped to fill, my dramatic sketch would have differed in little, or I really believe in nothing, from the performance of to-day. Should this statement be ever read by other eyes than my own, the writer of it will in all probability be accused of vanity ; but such a judgment if not, strictly speaking, an injustice, will decidedly be a blunder. There ~~has~~ been nothing either done or said by me this day, that could give rise to any feeling of vanity in my mind, upon recalling it. The chief discovery I have made, in accurately recalling all that has passed from the moment the first of our guests entered the drawing-room, to the moment at which I quitted it myself, is, that I am strong enough to bear a good deal of fatigue, and in the vocation I have chosen, *this* is decidedly a very great advantage. No woman, I conceive, could ever succeed in attaining to the position to which I aspire, were her constitution, either of mind or body, weak. Thank Heaven ! I am conscious of no such weakness. But it is not difficult to figure to oneself the sort of weariness likely to befall a female, weak



either in mind or body, when occupied as I have been to-day.


“Was there one single syllable uttered to which it was possible I could listen with interest? No!

“Was there a possibility of my uttering any syllable in return, expressive of my real thoughts, or my real feelings on any subject? No! no! no!

“Had I any doubt about the perfect arrangement of my beautiful drawing-room? or respecting the excellence of the dinner prepared for the common-place beings who were come to eat it? Most decidedly not.

“There was, therefore, none of the rousing interest produced either by hope or fear, to prevent my wishing with all my heart and soul that I was lying upon the comfortable sofa in my own bed-room, enjoying a good novel. But did I wish it? No! Again, most truly, most entirely did I prefer the tiresome little martyrdom I was undergoing, to any personal enjoyment whatever for which it might have been exchanged. I can only compare this feeling of preference for what was disagreeable, to that which it is easy to imagine a student in music

or painting, truly devoted to his art, might feel while studying its elements instead of indulging in some idle amusement. I think I may venture to say that no student, however enthusiastic in either art, ever felt a more steadfast earnestness in the study of it, than I do in the study of every thing that may assist in making me a conspicuous and admired leader in society. These are early days for me to pass judgment on myself as to my capability of attaining the position at which I aim ; but there are at least two important facts, concerning which I cannot be mistaken, and both of which I have ascertained to be in my favour. The first is, that I have none of the embarrassment produced by shyness, upon finding myself in a position that is new to me. The second, that however little amusing some of the steps may be which I must submit to take, in order to attain the social position at which I aim, no feeling of mere weariness will ever be likely to overcome my energy, or check my purpose. My first steps have been decidedly successful. *Courage ! en avant !*"



CHAPTER XVI.

Few people, I believe, as deeply convinced of their own strength as Charlotte Morris, fail altogether in obtaining the object they have in view ; for such a hearty conviction cannot rest on nothing. There must be something more substantial than mere fancy, or mere whim, to sustain it.

In this case there was the openly avowed indulgence of a rich father ; for rich he was, not so much from the amount of his income, as from its security, and from the experience and discretion with which it was managed.

Though Charlotte knew little or nothing as to the detail of all this, she had that sort of reasonable confidence in her wise father which placed her, as she felt, beyond the reach of

all pecuniary danger, and thus lent her a degree of courage as to projecting future *fêtes*, of a much more comfortable and healthful character than attends the scheming meditation of many ladies at the commencement of the London season.

Nor was Mr. Morris himself at all insensible to the pleasure of having so handsome a house, so well-ordered a table, and so very charming a daughter to sit at the head of it. He was all good-humour, smiles, and compliments, when they met on the following morning ; and these pleasant demonstrations were received on her side in a manner which did great credit to her sagacity ; for after thanking and caressing him in return for his cordial expressions of approval for all she had done, all she had said, and all she had looked on the preceding day, she very prettily told him that she was but an instrument in his hands, for that without his liberal hospitality, excellent taste, and kind indulgence, she neither should nor could be any thing beyond a shy and ignorant girl.

“ But I think you inspire me, papa !” she added, with sufficient seriousness to make the suggestion very flattering ; “ I do indeed ; I see

what you are at your end of the table, and my ambition is immediately awakened to become in some degree worthy of sitting opposite to you."

Poor Mr. Morris ! no wonder that he looked at his highly gratified and very happy daughter with satisfaction, for at that moment his memory reverted to the melancholy efforts he had made in former days to indulge his really hospitable feelings by having now and then two or three gentlemen to dine with him ; he had not yet forgotten the grumblings and reproaches which had invariably made part of his breakfast on the following morning, and the contrast was certainly well calculated to produce an agreeable effect.

"Do you think you will see our kind neighbours to-day, Charlotte ? I really think they ought to call this morning, and tell you without ceremony, what they think of this first attempt of yours in the receiving line."

"I dare say I shall see them, papa," she replied. "Mrs. Knighton is always very kind to me, and I am quite sure she will make no scruple of telling me of any thing that she thought amiss. I certainly am very lucky in having such very friendly neighbours. I really

think that our fortunate intimacy with them will spare us both a great deal of trouble and embarrassment; for, though I think I may say without vanity, that both you and I, papa, have a strong natural bias towards good fellowship and hospitality, I already see very plainly that it would be difficult to get on without the cordial assistance of some such friends. I don't mean, you know, as to the manner of receiving, for I really think, dear papa, that you and I between us could manage *that* pretty well without any assistance; but the great difficulty would be to collect round us such a circle as you would approve, without their aid."

"Quite true, my dear," said her father, "quite true. But take my word for it, Charlotte, they will be perfectly willing to afford you this aid. All we have to do is, to make them understand this; but the less you complain of this difficulty, the better. Remember, I give you *carte blanche* to arrange any evening parties you please, and with the help of Mrs. Knighton, I don't think you will find the task a very difficult one. We learnt, by her own fine ball last spring, that she has a large

acquaintance among gay and fashionable people, and I know enough of London life to be quite sure that about twenty to one of that elegant crowd would find it more easy and agreeable to come to the balls of other people, than to invite other people to come to theirs. But don't mistake me, Charlotte. Don't fancy that I am boasting of more wealth than the majority of those gay folks possess ; on the contrary, my dear, I have no doubt that, of the heads of families whom we met there, the majority are vastly more wealthy than I am. But I believe, nevertheless, that I have the advantage of many of them in one important point. I have no debts, no encumbrances, Charlotte. What I have nominally in the way of income, I have really. And then, you know, I have but one dear child to provide for, instead of many. Moreover, though we gave our good friends a very good dinner yesterday, and may give several more good dinners in the course of the year, and though I hope more than once before we rusticate again, to see you waltzing in your own drawing-room, we are *not* living extravagantly. In the first place, we do not keep a carriage ; that is a

very important item ; and, moreover, when we leave town, as we did this year, to enjoy the sea breezes, we were rather saving, than spending money by doing so. On the whole, therefore, I have no scruple whatever in telling you, that you are quite at liberty to arrange whatever evening parties you please, only taking care that you always let me have whatever bills there are to be paid in consequence, within a week after they are due. As long as we adhere to this rule, Charlotte, we shall be in no danger of finding ourselves out-running the constable."

It may easily be imagined that this very important harangue was listened to with great satisfaction by the person to whom it was addressed ; and, although she neither did, nor, perhaps, could have expressed *quite all* the pleasure it gave her, the *tête-à-tête* was not broken up, without her expressing, in very affectionate terms, her gratitude for both his affection and his confidence.

The morning, as she expected, did not pass away without a visit from the Knighton ladies ; and, on this occasion, they all came, as if moved by the same impulse, to compliment

her on the success of her first performance in the "fine art" of receiving company.

The young Charlotte received these compliments very placidly. She did not look as if she were either surprised or delighted by them ; but she smiled and bowed with the air of one, who feels that the words addressed to her are obliging, though not important. She suffered the sweet little shower to pass over her and cease, before she attempted to turn this expected visit to the use she intended.

What she intended to say, however, could in no way be better introduced than by hitching it on to what had already passed. Mrs. Knighton had just said that she had never seen a dinner-party go off more pleasantly, and that she did not believe that it would be easy to find many young ladies who could, for the first time, sit at the head of the table with so little embarrassment.

"I did not feel conscious of there being any cause for embarrassment," replied Charlotte, quietly ; "but your kindness is a great encouragement to my attempting to comply with papa's wishes, in a matter which might not be quite so easy "

“As how, my dear?” returned Mrs. Knighton, briskly. “What great feat has he proposed to you?”

“Why, the greatness of the feat will depend altogether upon my courage, and upon the kindness of others in assisting me. The fact is, that papa wants me to give an evening party.”

“Well! and why not, my dear?” returned Mrs. Knighton, very promptly. “Many ladies, I believe, consider the giving a dinner-party, as a more troublesome thing than giving a ball.”

“I dare say it may in some houses, Mrs. Knighton,” returned Charlotte, in an accent which seemed in a transition state between the tone of girlish indifference and full-grown self-esteem, “but not in ours,” she added. “We have a very good cook, and all papa’s tradespeople seem very punctual and attentive to his orders. I know that he tells them his attention to their bills will be regulated by their attention to his orders; and this seems to answer very well. But you know, my dear Mrs. Knighton, that a widower, as papa has been for many years, with no one whatever to

preside in his drawing-room, is not very likely to have preserved many ball-going acquaintance ; and the natural consequence is, that I scarcely know ladies enough to make up a quadrille, much less to fill our rooms."

"Of course, my dear girl!" exclaimed Margaret, with great vivacity. "But do you fancy that you are the first young lady who has, at the beginning of her career, found herself precisely in the same predicament? It happens perpetually! Does it not, mamma?"

"Assuredly, Margaret," returned her mother, with an assenting nod; "and a moment's reflection must convince Miss Morris that it is impossible it should be otherwise. However, you know, there is a remedy."

"Of course there is, and a very easy one, dear Charlotte!" said her friend *par excellence*, adding, in the distinct voice of affectionate authority—"You must get mamma to invite your company for you, Charlotte. This sort of thing happens every day."

"Yes," said Mrs. Knighton, quickly, "scarcely a month ever passes without it, in the season, I believe."

"But would your mamma take so much

trouble for me?" said Charlotte, gravely, addressing Louisa.

"Mamma must speak for herself, my dear," replied Louisa, leaning back in the arm-chair, of which she had taken possession. "Of course, I cannot answer for her." Margaret looked at her mother and laughed, which laugh being skilfully interpreted, would have said, "*But if you can't, I can.*"

Mrs. Knighton, however, wanted no assistance in such a case as this. She answered readily, yet not without a certain tone of reserve, which indicated that the thing, though feasible, was not absolutely and altogether easy.

"I should be very sorry to refuse you anything, my dear Charlotte, which may really be of such important service to you as collecting a good set round you on an occasion so important as that of giving your first party, and, therefore, I feel perfectly willing to say that I *am* ready to undertake it."

"I thank you very much, Mrs. Knighton, and I accept your offer joyfully," said Charlotte, with rather a dignified bow.

"But nevertheless, my dear," resumed Mrs. Knighton, "we cannot proceed to business without a full and complete understanding with your good papa. Before a person, as well known in society as I am, undertakes to invite a party for a young friend, either newly-married or newly brought out, it is absolutely necessary that she should be informed of the exact style of the entertainment about to be given. You understand me, my dear?"

"Yes, perfectly. I understand you perfectly, Mrs. Knighton," returned Charlotte, with a slight smile; "but in this, I believe, I can give you the necessary information better than papa."


"Indeed, my dear!" returned Mrs. Knighton, in a tone expressive of a little doubt.

"I think so, ma'am," replied Charlotte, with great meekness, "because papa has told me this morning, that, in case I *should* take it into my head to wish to give a party, he gave me full permission to do so in any style I chose, the only condition being, that I was to send in all the bills to him within a week after it had taken place. As to the amount of the bills, he gave me *carte blanche*."

A rapid glance passed between the three ladies of the Knighton family ; but there was something very affectionate in the manner with which Louisa set in action the excellent castors of her arm-chair, and rolled herself close to that corner of the sofa on which her friend was seated.

“ My dear love ! ” said Mrs. Knighton, playfully interposing the end of her parasol between the lips of Louisa and the ear of the enviable young lady to whom she was about to whisper some loving secret ; “ my dear love ! you must positively banish my tiresome Louisa from your presence, if you intend that you and I shall arrive at any useful practical termination to our consultation, for I am quite certain that she will not leave you at peace for a moment ! She is a perfect baby when a ball is talked of ; and she is so fond of you, Charlotte, that the idea of seeing you doing the honours of a full drawing-room is quite enough to turn her head.”

“ Indeed, you are all exceedingly kind to me,” returned Charlotte, very quietly ; “ but I am not meditating anything at present at all approaching a full room. Nevertheless, I shall



want a little of your experience, and of your active assistance, too, my dear Mrs. Knighton, before I can achieve the little I do meditate."

"But I thought you said you wished to give a ball, my dear Charlotte? Do you really consider *that* as a trifling undertaking?"

"Oh, no!" was the reply, but uttered in a tone of very philosophical composure. "I should lose a species of pleasure that I now look forward to with great interest if I did. If I did not think the giving a ball a matter of some importance, Mrs. Knighton, I would not derange my drawing-room for it. But I really have no idea of doing anything of the kind at present. I think it is much too early in the season."


Mrs. Knighton looked disappointed, and Louisa puzzled; but Margaret, who had scarcely spoken since they entered the room, had the air of one who, for some especial purpose of her own, was bent upon quietly seeing, hearing, and understanding what was going on.

Not any of these symptoms were lost on Charlotte. She was beginning to feel that she was already of some consequence, and her na-

ture was one well calculated to make the most of it. Even at this early period of her existence, she felt amusement to be a very secondary object. Charlotte Morris wished to be distinguished, not amused ; and she now began to feel very distinctly, that although it was inevitably necessary for her to undergo the wearying ceremony of being personally introduced to a multitude of very uninteresting individuals, yet, this necessary ceremony once over, she should very speedily be able to dispense with all the assistance which it was in the power of the whole race of Knighton, either collectively or individually, to bestow.

But though the four ladies now sitting *en petit comité* in Charlotte's morning drawing-room all wore the pleasant aspect of confidential intimacy, engaged in friendly discussion, there were no two of them who had the same objects in view.

Could their respective thoughts have been laid entirely open, they would have been found wonderfully discordant, considering that they were all ostensibly engaged upon the same subject. If the comparative dignity of their respective meditations and speculations were



to decide the comparative dignity of their respective characters, Louisa must take the lowest place, her mother the next, her sister Margaret the third, and my heroine very decidedly the highest.

Louisa was thinking truly and avowedly of the additional chance of future balls which the present discussion seemed to open to her. Mrs. Knighton was as truly, but less avowedly, devoting all her thoughts to another branch of the same subject. Her brain, indeed, was very actively at work upon the possible and probable assistance to be derived from opening a sort of partnership concern in the ball-going and ball-giving line, with a youthful tyro who might run up as many bills as she liked, with no other condition annexed than the sending them for immediate payment to a wealthy individual, who had given her unlimited credit on him.

Miss Margaret's meditations took a more important direction still ; they were not confined either to the giving of balls or the paying for them. In fact, the text upon which her imagination was preaching to her, as she sat silently looking through the open folding-doors

into the front drawing-room, and contemplating the various elegant specimens of Mr. Morris' good taste which it contained, consisted of the words,—“ *If Mr. Morris should not marry again.*”

And in meditating upon this text, the thoughts of Margaret Knighton were of a much more important order than those either of her mother or her sister.

Meanwhile, the thoughts of Charlotte Morris flew higher still, infinitely higher. She felt somewhat as a bold young navigator might do, who, having firmly placed his foot upon the first step of the cordage which led to the highest pinnacle of the tapering mast, determined to relax that hold no more till he had reached that highest point, and thence looked out upon the new world, whose splendours were as yet only known to him in dreams.


Assuredly my heroine felt that she had her feet upon the ladder, and her hand upon the rope; nor did she feel the slightest fear that she should be obliged to relax her hold of either till she had climbed as high as they would enable her to go.

The vivacity of demeanour displayed by these

four ladies was in pretty exact proportion to the intensity of purpose which actuated each, only it was in an inverse ratio. Louisa fluttered and chattered with the vivacity of a very brisk bird hopping from spray to spray. Her mother looked obligingly busy, and very much in earnest. Margaret had the sedate air of a person who thinks the conversation going on around rather trifling and troublesome; while Charlotte—the deeply, profoundly meditative Charlotte—listened and spoke with an air of such quiet indifference, that it almost seemed as if she listened at all, solely from politeness to the persons speaking to her, and in no degree from feeling any particular interest in the subject discussed.

Mrs. Knighton checked her own rather dignified eloquence for a moment, and looked at her earnestly; and then, for the first time, she began to suspect that she did not quite understand the young lady she had to deal with.

Notwithstanding the two or three little traits of decision and self-confidence which had struck her in Miss Morris' demeanour at table on the preceding day, and which led to the



doubts respecting her age which she had expressed, Mrs. Knighton was far from giving her credit for the independent and magnanimous state of mind at which she now seemed to have arrived.

Was it possible that this young nobody could really feel herself so magnanimously independent as she looked? The party-giving lady of thirty successive seasons was thrown out. She began to suspect that her assistance was not so vitally important as she had imagined, and that the *nonchalante* young damsel before her must have some other means to put in action, in case her own assistance was withdrawn, to which she would apply if she found it necessary.

Where, or from whom Miss Charlotte was to look for this aid, it would have been difficult to say: that is, as Mrs. Knighton felt, it would be difficult for *her*, a stranger to Mr. Morris and all his past history and connexions, to say; but it was by no means impossible but that these new neighbours *might* have some friends of higher degree belonging to them, who, though they had not as yet appeared upon the scene, might be waited for, if she herself

failed, and rob her, when at length they came forth, of all the great and obvious advantages which she felt certain would be within her reach, if she made good use of the opportunities now open to her.

Instead, therefore, of looking cold, because Charlotte did not look agitated, she renewed her caressing smiles, and said, good-humouredly, "It will be easy to help you, my dear, because you have common-sense enough to help yourself. It *is*, as you justly say, too early in the season, much too early, for any one to think of giving a regular ball, as yet ; but you have only to tell me in what way you think I *can* be useful to you, in order to find that I am willing to be so."

Nothing could be better than the tone in which Charlotte returned her thanks. It was perfectly cordial, but it was neither formal nor fulsome.

"What I aim at, just at the present moment, is to have a few clever, pleasant people who would come and meet you at dinner sometimes, and assist me through a small evening party afterwards. Do you know Mr. and Mrs. Richards intimately, my dear Mrs. Knighton?"

The complexion of Mrs. Knighton was a little heightened, as she replied, "*Intimately* is such an elastic word, my dear Miss Charlotte! Ye—es, I think I may say we know them intimately. They have dined with us, you know, and that never happens when there is not some degree of intimacy; but they are always so deeply engaged, that it is by no means an easy thing to get them."

"But I must contrive it, somehow or other," replied Charlotte, playfully, "and I am sure you can manage it for me, if you will."


"I am quite ready to try, dear; but how are we to set about it? You have never been introduced to them as yet, have you?"

"No," was the prompt reply.

"Well, then, how are we to begin?"

"I think the best way will be for you to ask us to dinner to meet them."

The complexion of Mrs. Knighton again underwent a slight change. "I should be delighted!" said the patronizing lady. And there she stopped. She knew well, what Miss Charlotte only guessed, she knew well, poor lady, that it was vastly easier for her to talk of giving a dinner party, than to achieve it;



she knew only too well that there happened at this particular time to be a heavy bill against her at the fishmonger's, and she knew, moreover, that her husband had very recently declared that he could not, and would not, order in any more champagne, till he had at least paid an instalment on the bill that had been so long running on.

Now it was quite a matter of London notoriety that Mr. Richards never dined anywhere unless he was sure of getting good champagne, and enough of it; and the idea of asking him to a party so sentimentally friendly as to exclude the necessity for it, was totally out of the question.

Mrs. Knighton was in a very painful dilemma. She plainly saw that very many contingent advantages might be reaped by establishing an intimate friendship with the banker's daughter, upon the firm and rational principle of *give and take*. She felt to her very fingers' ends the utility of the scheme, nor did her feelings at all revolt from the principle. But how, chained and encumbered as she was, could she put it in action? Unhappily, the

part she had to play obliged her to be first upon the scene, and under existing circumstances this appeared absolutely impossible. These thoughts had passed rapidly, but even now some seconds of awkward silence had already elapsed; and, fully aware of this, the uncomfortable lady became redder still.

At last "a bright thought struck her," having considerable analogy to friendship, but not, perhaps, including its eternity. "Why," thought the anxious Mrs. Knighton, "why should I not tell her the truth at once? The doing so would at once remove every embarrassment, every difficulty." The opportune felicity of the idea required no second thought to put it in action. She abruptly rose from her chair, and, seizing the hand of Miss Morris in hers, said in a half-whisper, "Let me speak to you for five minutes alone!"

Had it been constantly the habit of Mrs. Knighton, upon the occurrence of every little pecuniary difficulty, requiring a trifling degree of intrigue and contrivance to meet it—had it been constantly her habit to silence the curiosity of her daughters on such occasions, by saying, "Be innocent of this, my dearest

chuck!"—her manœuvring on the present occasion would have been more difficult; but such had never been her habit, and it was, therefore, without any feeling of embarrassment that she now spoke those mysterious words to her young hostess.

Neither did her daughters feel, or make any difficulty in assisting her to accomplish her purpose. The whisper had been sufficiently audible for Margaret to say, with a playful smile, "If you want to talk secrets with Miss Morris, mamma, Louisa and I can easily make ourselves scarce. Come, Lou, let us amuse ourselves by looking at all the pretty things in the front drawing-room."

The laughing invitation was laughingly accepted, and the two Knighton sisters walked through the folding doors arm in arm.

They performed their part in the scene gracefully and well; but certainly there would have been more merit in this, had they both of them left quite as well aware as Mrs. Knighton herself, that she meant to turn her confidential intimacy with their young neighbour to account, and that she was "about it."


“ I do not like to make my dear girls share quite all the anxieties I have to endure, my dear Miss Morris, and your excellent good sense will, I am sure, lead you to agree with me in thinking that my reserve is both wise and kind. I perfectly understand your situation, my dear young lady, and I have very sincere pleasure in telling you that I consider it in all ways a very happy one, although the early loss of your mother must of necessity oblige you to seek on some points the agency of a female friend to supply her place. That you should wish to make *me* that friend is very gratifying to me—for I like you. You must be aware, my dear Charlotte, that we all like you, indeed we do ; and there is not one among us who would not, and will not, witness the brilliant success in society which we are sure you will attain, with the most heartfelt pleasure.”

My heroine bowed a little stiffly, smiled a little affably, and muttered something appropriate about being much obliged.

“ Nothing could be more easy, and nothing could be more natural,” resumed Mrs. Knighton, “ than that a young girl like you




should address herself to a middle-aged woman of the world, like me, in order to arrange the best mode of taking the first necessary steps for forming a circle of your own ; and, but for a most unlucky *contretemps*, I will venture to say, dear Charlotte, that you could not easily have addressed yourself better. Neither do I know any point at which we could more advantageously begin the work we are about, than by following your suggestion of getting the Richards to dine with you at our house, for the sooner you contrive to get them among your own dinner guests, the better. But now, my dear young friend, comes the painful part of my communication. Mr. Knighton is in every respect as honourable a gentleman as any living, but several unfortunate circumstances have occurred which have obliged him in a slight degree to exceed his income. He is, however, I flatter myself, in a fair way to pay off all his incumbrances ; but till this is done, I know it would be in vain for me to suggest anything like a regular dinner-party to him ; and yet I am quite aware that this is the only mode of meeting this celebrated Mr.



Richards with any hope of becoming well acquainted with him."

"I feel greatly obliged by your friendly frankness, my dear madam," replied Charlotte, "and trust you will kindly excuse the indiscretion which rendered it in some sort necessary."

"There is nothing to excuse, my dear," returned Mrs. Knighton, affectionately taking her hand; "and to prove to you how far I am from regretting that there should be this sort of perfect confidence between us, I will without scruple point out to you a mode by which the object we have in view may be obtained, without my having recourse to any manœuvring for the purpose of inducing Mr. Knighton to give an expensive dinner-party, which I know he would just now rather avoid giving.—And, *entre nous*, Charlotte, it may be well to give you a useful hint while I think of it; a dinner to Mr. Richards *must* be an expensive dinner. He is considered to be the best judge of wine in London, and no one would ever get him a second time, who failed to gratify his fastidious taste the first."



Perhaps Mrs. Knighton fancied that the young lady received this friendly caution with a grateful smile. Her aunt Buckhurst might have described the movement of her lips as a somewhat contemptuous sneer; but Charlotte bent her head at the moment, and said nothing.

"Well, my dear," resumed the elder lady, "I think I know a way by which you may make the acquaintance of the Richards in a manner the most likely possible to produce intimacy."

"As how, ma'am?" said Charlotte rather eagerly.

"Tell me, my dear, do you think your father would have any objection to having your picture taken?"

"I have often heard him say that he should like it," replied the young lady, colouring with pleasure at the happy suggestion, which she saw in a moment would lead to what she wished, and in a manner which she should greatly prefer to that which she had previously proposed.

"Then name it to him, my dear love! and say that I suggested it," returned the greatly

delighted Mrs. Knighton, who on her side saw, with as brilliant perspicuity as that of her clever young friend, that this scheme offered a very agreeable opportunity of propitiating the favour of the coquettish Mr. Richards on her own account.



CHAPTER XVII.

CHARLOTTE MORRIS owed more to the clever suggestion of Mrs. Knighton than it was possible for either of them to anticipate at the time it was made.

Neither Mrs. Knighton, nor Mr. Wilson either, though they had both of them attempted to make my heroine understand the amount of Mr. Richards' fashionable popularity, as well as the nature of it, had succeeded in giving her any very clear ideas on the subject. In fact, they were neither of them sufficiently *au fait* of the said subject to do so; and therefore, as he is of some importance to my story, I must endeavour to act the part of chorus myself, that what follows may become more easily intelligible.

It has been already stated that Mr. Richards, though only an artist, and an artist by no means of the highest, or even of the higher rank of his noble profession, was nevertheless greatly sought in society, and considered himself, and was considered by many others, as very much "THE FASHION;" which, being interpreted, means, I presume, that it was the fashion to exhibit him in dining and drawing-rooms, for the purpose of making him display his talents for the recreation and amusement of the parties assembled therein. And so it was. It really was the fashion to have Mr. Richards, and to make him exhibit himself, and his giantess wife, for the good of the lookers and listeners, who preferred having ready-made wit circulated amongst them, to the dismal chance of having none at all.

But it would be leading the more innocent and inexperienced of my readers into great delusion, if I left them to suppose that the Mr. Richards, to whom I have now the honour of introducing them, was of the highest order of fine souls among the productive classes, or that those of the patronizing classes whose sufferance bestowed upon him this precious ticket of

fashion, were of the very highest order of fine souls either.

Fine souls, and fine bodies too, have their gradations, and I think it is more than probable that my Mr. Richards would never, under any circumstances, have been able to make his way to the apex.

Nevertheless he might fairly boast of a much larger *following* of admirers than usually falls to the lot of ordinary mortals, especially (as was notoriously the case with him) where no worldly advantages either of birth or fortune eke out, adorn, and illuminate the gifts of nature.

It is therefore but fair to presume that Mr. Richards *was* a man of talent, and it is as such that I wish to present him to the reader.

As a portrait-painter Mr. Richards sometimes made a capital hit ; he had a happy knack of frequently catching the general look and character of a face, even when he failed to give a correct likeness of the features ; and this knack, which, even to himself, always seemed to be accidental, brought more sitters to his *estrate* than either his strong light and shade, or his vivid colouring.

Nor was this the only species of cleverness which helped him in his profession. A vast many more sitters came to him in the way that Miss Morris was now about to do, that is to say, with the ultimate object of making him a dinner guest, who should set the table in a roar, or an evening loungee whose jocose performances at the piano might supply all deficiencies of musical talent in an abortive party, than he would ever have obtained from the hope of his making one of his lucky hits of canvass mimicry.

In short, altogether (inclusive of his incognito caricature dealings in the Haymarket), he had made enough by his profession to have been by this time an independent, if not a rich man, had it not been for his tuft-hunting vanity, and his unbounded extravagance.

He had married his large wife for love, or at any rate neither from avarice nor ambition ; for she had not a sou, and by far the most dignified connection she could boast was a respectable grocer in a small way, who had married her first cousin.

My heroine speedily ascertained that she had not overrated her influence with her father,

when she told Mrs. Knighton that there would be no difficulty in obtaining his consent to her having her portrait taken by Mr. Richards.

Of Mr. Richards he knew little beyond his name ; for Mr. Morris had never yet been fortunate enough to witness any of his brilliant exploits in society. In fact, the only time he had ever met him was at Mrs. Knighton's ball, during the whole of which he had been himself occupied at the whist table, while the pet painter was winning loud laughter from all sorts of men, and women too, in every room where the card-table was not.

This personal ignorance, however, concerning Mr. Richards, and everything about him, was no obstacle to the speedy conclusion of the intended arrangement. Mr. and Miss Morris were taken by Mrs. Knighton to the painting-room of Mr. Richards, and the preliminaries of the business were settled without a shadow of difficulty or delay ; for Mr. Richards happened at that particular time to be rather more than usually in want of a little ready money ; and Mr. Richards, like other great men, occasionally found himself obliged to do what he did not particularly like to do, in order to smooth

the way for doing something that he liked better. There was nothing sufficiently striking in the appearance of Miss Morris to afford him any hope of making one of his *hits*, neither was there any thing particularly suggestive of caricature ; and even if there had been, there was not an atom of that marketable notoriety about her which a man of genius, such as Mr. Richards, knows so well how to turn to account. But, nevertheless, he accepted the commission with very gracious readiness, for his spirits were cheered by remembering that half the price would be paid at the first sitting.

“And how do dear Mrs. Richards and Zelah do?” said Mrs. Knighton, as soon as, the business part of the visit being settled, Mr. Morris had bowed himself out.

“Quite well, thank you,” replied the artist, bowing her too, at the same time, towards the door.

“Oh, my dear Mr. Richards !” exclaimed the cousin of Lady Wilcox Smith, suddenly rushing to a distant corner of the room, “step here for one moment, that I may deliver a

private embassy from your good friends in Harley Street."

Now the Wilcox Smith family really were the very good friends of Mr. Richards, and he therefore obeyed her beckon with a rapid step.

"I thought I should hear from Lady Wilcox Smith to-day," said he.

"Then I have no doubt you will hear from her," replied Mrs. Knighton, "though I am not now her messenger. What I wanted to say in your ear, dear Mr. Richards, is, that you will find these Morrisises very agreeable people. They are very rich, give first-rate dinners, and both the father and his young heiress are reckoned very clever, and certainly give one proof of it by their earnest wish to become acquainted with you and your family. I think you would find her such a nice friend for your little Zelah! May I call upon Mrs. Richards before I leave your house this morning?"

Mr. Richards was aware that Mrs. Knighton's swans occasionally turned out to be geese; nevertheless, he very condescendingly complied with her request, for tidings of a new sitter always put him in good humour; and

accordingly, having arranged all further professional preliminaries as to dress, and the days and hours for sitting, Charlotte, to her very great delight, was ushered into the drawing-room of Mrs. Richards.

The hour was rather an early one for even the morning toilet of a fine lady to be completed ; but Mrs. Richards, albeit a very fine lady in her own esteem, might have made her *entrée* without scruple into a ball-room. A wreath of flowers encircled her brow, and from the knot of redundant hair at the back of her head hung lappets of fine lace, or else a very good imitation of that beautiful material. Her robe was pea-green satin, profusely decorated with blonde. She was very tall, very fat, and very fair. Some people really thought her handsome ; and many more, of whom her husband was one, assured her that she was exceedingly beautiful. Her airs and graces were of restless and almost childish variety, the only trait perfectly unaffected in her character being the sincere and deep-seated belief that she was the handsomest woman in England, and that her husband was the cleverest man.

She received her guests with great affability

and condescension, as she always did when her husband acted as groom of the chambers, being perfectly sure that he would not take the trouble of bringing any one up stairs (his painting-room being on the ground floor) unless he had good and sufficient reason for doing so ;—indeed, to prevent any inconvenient doubt on this point, it was his usual custom, and he did not break through it on the present occasion, to take an opportunity of giving his wife a comic and very expressive hint, whenever he wished her to understand that he had particularly good and sufficient reasons for what he was doing.

This manœuvre, which would, of course, have lost its value, like all other secrets, had it been perceptible to any eyes save hers, was rendered both easy and safe by the playful use of the pocket-handkerchief which at such times he always carried in his hand.


On first entering the room Mrs. Knighton and Miss Morris thought, that the full-dressed lady who rose to receive them occupied it alone ; but after a minute or two, Mr. Richards, in a tone which seemed to convey reproof, pronounced the name of "Zelah !" and then

the two ladies, following the direction of her eyes, discovered a diminutive figure gathered up, and almost lost to view in the deep recess of an enormous arm-chair.

“Oh ! dear me ! Is Miss Zelah there ?” exclaimed Mrs. Knighton. “How do you do, my love ? will you come and shake hands with me ?”

Thus called upon, the child—for in appearance she was nothing more—thrust back the book, from which she was reading, into the back part of the deep seat, and with a light movement sprang upon her feet and approached the lady who had invited her to the ceremony of shaking hands.

My heroine was not addicted to the weakness of sudden and startled admiration, and this was probably the first time in her life that she had forgotten herself, while contemplating the beauty and grace of another. But upon this occasion she did very literally forget herself, for at the very moment that the fairy feet of Zelah touched the floor, Mr. Richards was in the act of presenting his new sitter to his wife ; yet although this introduction was precisely the thing she had been most earnestly




wishing to obtain, she literally forgot all about it at the very moment it was taking place. However, this was of no great consequence to any body, for as neither the master nor the mistress of the mansion cared one straw about Mrs. Knighton's young lady, beyond the value already assigned to her in the wish which, as before mentioned, had passed between them, Charlotte was left to contemplate the figure of the little Zelah without any demonstration either of displeasure or surprize on the part of her parents. This easy indifference on their part might have arisen, perhaps, in some degree from their having been a good deal accustomed to see strangers stare at their little girl, for she was in truth a very remarkable child.

There is indeed, generally speaking, a powerful degree of fascination in the bloom and the innocence of childhood; but the attraction of Zelah Richards was not exactly of that kind. Her complexion, though delicately pure, was not bright; there was a beautiful freshness about her mouth which prevented her looking sickly, but otherwise there was but little of the rose in her colouring. The form of her features and the contour of

her face were beautiful, and as strictly regular as even her artist father could desire for a fancy model; but it was in the deep, dark, violet-coloured eye that the extraordinary charm of that innocent face consisted. There was meaning in it; there was always meaning in little Zelah's eye; and a sentimental prophet might have easily foretold that, if she lived, the time would come, when the interpreting that meaning would be one of the most interesting occupations that a man could have.

It must not be supposed, however, that my heroine, clever as she was, was likely to appreciate all the loveliness already developed in that delicate face, or to prophesy all that might beam upon it hereafter. Nevertheless she did see a good deal, and moreover prophesied a good deal more. She not only saw the sweet face of Zelah, but her light and graceful form also; she saw the elastic movement by which she sprang from the deep recess of the huge arm-chair which was the accustomed scene of all her intellectual pleasures, and assumed the attitude of a good child ready to make an obedient curtsy; and Charlotte, as she looked at her, thought what a pretty toy



she would be in a drawing-room, amidst a small circle of clever people, who liked to be amused by something a little out of the common way.

From all she had heard both from Mr. Wilson and the Knightons, she was quite aware that she could not open her campaign better than by forming a familiar intimacy with the Richards family, and she was much too rapid a reasoner to require many seconds of meditation before she reached the conclusion that the making a pet of that beautiful little girl would be the very easiest and most effectual scheme she could hit upon for the purpose.


The little scene which followed need not be described, because it was so very like what happens every day, when one lady, for any motive whatever, endeavours to propitiate the favour of another lady, by making a great deal of love to her child. Not but that my heroine had quite cleverness enough to have varied the scene a little, by some small flattering innovations of her own; but Charlotte Morris did not intend to rest her hopes of obtaining the object she aimed at, upon her power of propitiating the parental gratitude of Zelah's parents, by a

vehement demonstration of her own admiring fondness for their offspring.

She knew better than that.

She just exhibited enough of her love and admiration, to make any more substantial testimonies of both, which might come after, appear very natural as well as very amiable. And then she devoted herself, during the remainder of the short visit, to the making pretty speeches about the charming portraits down stairs, and the charming room up stairs. Moreover, there were two other clever things which she did before Mrs. Knighton marched her back to the carriage. The first of these clever things was her pointing out a strong resemblance (which, by the way, really existed) between the mouth of Mr. Richards, and that of his beautiful little daughter.

The mouth of Mr. Richards had occasionally an expression that gave the idea of an immensity of latent laughter, which was not at the command of every speaker, but which, when called into action, promised unmistakeably to ~~provoke~~ laughter in others. Mr. Richards was far from being either handsome or gentlemanlike in appearance; but that mouth of




his made it impossible for any one to say that he was disagreeable-looking.

But what redeemed his coarse features from positive ugliness, gave to the delicate traits of his beautiful little girl a sort of half-concealed archness, which seemed playing at "*bo peep*" round her ruby lips, as if too shy to betray itself by laughter.


Of this odd, fleeting resemblance Mr. Richards was perfectly aware, and never (except when in the act of receiving money) was better pleased than when it was observed and commented upon. It would have been difficult for my heroine to have said any thing which could more effectually have helped her on towards intimacy with Mr. Richards.

The second proof which she gave of possessing the sort of cleverness so essential to success in the career to which she had determined to devote herself, was her finding or making an opportunity for spying out the title of the huge volume with which Zelah had been regaling herself, in the remotest corner of her great arm-chair. This was not only taking an important peep into the mind of the little creature, whose liking she was determined to



propitiate, but it might help her in the important matter of *present-making*.

Are we, indeed, affected by the antecedent habits, as well as the antecedent health, and the antecedent features of our progenitors? If so, we ought to look with indulgent eyes upon the propensity so evidently predominant in my heroine: she never forgot that, whatever we make up our minds to have, we must make up our minds to pay for. It was a truth ever present to her mind, when she had some important object in view; and there can be little or no doubt, that this very essential morsel of practical wisdom had been habitually present also to the minds of her commercial and highly-respectable ancestors. Certain it is, that, whatever might have been the origin of this deeply-rooted notion in the mind of Charlotte Morris, it existed there in so much activity, that she was thought, by all whom she particularly wished to oblige, to be one of the most generous creatures in existence. There might have been others, perhaps, who judged her differently; but it is a certain and indisputable fact, that she did make a great many presents.



She gave nothing, however, to Mrs. Knighton for having taken her where she so greatly wished to go, except thanks. Perhaps, young as she was, she was aware that this lady would find no difficulty in remunerating herself, by being paid a fair per centage for the sitter she had taken to Mr. Richards, in the current coin of his *bon mots*, gay laughter, and extempore lyrics.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. MORRIS was greatly pleased by his visit to the painting-room of Mr. Richards. There was a life and spirit in some of the portraits judiciously retained there, which he fully appreciated, and the result was an immediate determination on his part to cultivate the personal acquaintance of a man who was evidently a very clever fellow, and who, moreover, if he got really intimate with them, and thoroughly familiar with the charming countenance of his Charlotte, might bestow upon him a treasure past all price, by producing a likeness of her as full of life as those which he had seen in his painting-room.

The expression of this feeling and this purpose, when Charlotte next met her father

tête-à-tête, was as welcome as one of his dear, kind, darling ten-pound notes could have been, and he was complimented and caressed accordingly. To use one of my heroine's own private (not public) phrases, "she never suffered the grass to grow under her feet," and it was with a sort of ease and celerity which perfectly startled Mrs. Knighton, that, having got an invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Richards sent and accepted, she ran into that lady's drawing-room, and, *sans cérémonie*, invited her and her exceedingly well-pleased spouse to dine with them at seven o'clock on the following Saturday, "to meet those nice Richardses."


"To meet those nice Richardses!" mentally repeated Mrs. Knighton in supreme astonishment; and so really genuine was this astonishment, that, though she did not utter it, she could utter nothing else, and it was, therefore, Mr. Knighton who, contrary to all established rule, accepted the free and easy invitation thus cordially given.

Charlotte failed not to read aright the broad stare that seemed to have fixed itself on Mrs. Knighton's countenance.

"I gallop at rather a quicker pace than she can follow," thought the young lady, but, much too skilful to betray any indication of observing her at all, she fixed her eyes on a bouquet which stood on the table, and shaking her head with a look of vexation and uneasiness, she said, "But there is one thing I am so sorry for, dearest Mrs. Knighton! Papa is *very* sorry too, but he says that he has not room this time for your dear young ladies at dinner. It is such a pity, isn't it?"

"Oh dear no, not at all," replied Mrs. Knighton, readily; and, overcoming the first startling effect of this most unexpected invitation, she added, "you and your good papa must never trouble yourselves, my dear, by ever thinking of asking our girls to a dinner-party. Like all other girls, you know, their real delight is in good evening-parties, where, somehow or other, they can contrive to get up a waltz. But, between ourselves, they really hate dinner-parties."

This assurance suited the politics both of the giver and the receiver; and as they were equally well aware that it was perfectly



false, it did no harm ; but the accidental absence of the young ladies was felt to be a piece of great good luck by the trio present, for they, each and all, knew perfectly well that the very convenient assurance thus given and received would have been met by a very unceremonious contradiction, had they been present. As it was, however, all went well. Miss Morris skipped back to her papa with the pleasant intelligence that his invitation had been most graciously accepted, and that the young ladies were to come in the evening.

“Bravo, Charlotte !” exclaimed Mr. Morris, in high glee ; “you certainly are a jewel, and deserve a rich setting, and you shall have it, my dear, to the utmost extent of my power. Young as you are, my darling, you have taught me already to know that I can trust you much better than I can myself, about all the little difficulties I anticipated as to forming a proper circle of society for you. So I shall take the thing easy, Charlotte, and let you manage the rudder.”

“And with you at my side, papa,” she re-

plied, "I shall set to work with a good heart, for I am sure you would stop me without loss of time, if you found I was steering wrong."

"So I will, Charlotte," he replied, kissing her forehead with as much respect as affection, for he was beginning to think her the very cleverest girl he had ever seen or heard of.

"And now tell me," he added, "who else is there that you should like me to invite for Saturday? We don't know any other ladies, do we, that we should like to have?"

"No, certainly, dear papa," she immediately replied, "not one! And if there were a thousand, I should still say, as to inviting them, NOT ONE! Remember, papa, this is not to be a fine party, but a pleasant one. The very best possible dinner on rather a small scale, and the very, *very* best of all possible wines. As to ladies, you know, the inviting Mrs. Knighton to meet Mrs. Richards will perfectly satisfy both in that article, and I should recommend your making your party up to ten, by inviting three gentlemen. Our round table is just perfect for ten, without having the least

appearance of a large party, and a large party is exactly what we ought to avoid. I know that Mr. Richards hates a large party, and our present object, you know, is to propitiate him. I shall neither now nor ever, dearest papa, waste your time or my own either by repeating to you all the gossip I may hear, either from the Knightons or from any one else, respecting the rapidly increasing circle of our acquaintance. All that I hear about any of them of sufficient importance to be useful, I will take care to treasure up and repeat to you, and you must perform the same kind office to me. This is a bargain, is it not?"

"Yes. And I subscribe to it cordially, Charlotte, for I never find any great amusement in canvassing the affairs of people who do not in any way belong to me. And I may indulge in this sort of laziness with a safe conscience, because I have you, my dear child, to keep a look out for me, so that I shall be in no danger of blundering about any of the new people I may chance to meet. And now, Charlotte, as to our snug dinner-party

for Saturday. Who are to be our three men?"

"I vote decidedly for Mr. Herbert as one," replied Charlotte. "We improved our acquaintance with him very much, you know, during our bathing season; and as you meet him constantly at the club, nothing can be easier than for you to ask him, *sans cérémonie*, to come and dine with you at seven o'clock, to meet Richards."

Her father laughed heartily at the tone she so dramatically assumed, and promised to imitate it as nearly as possible, adding, "Go on, my dear! Who else?"

"What do you say to Mr. Folkstone? The son, I mean," said Charlotte, slightly colouring. "It will save you trouble," she added, "because you are so sure to see him also at your club."

And why—let us interrupt the conversation between the father and daughter for one moment to enquire,—*why* did Charlotte name young Mr. Folkstone? And why did she blush when she had done it? Was she beginning to fall in love with the young man?

No, not the least in the world. But she was more than beginning to feel quite sure that the young man had fallen in love with her. And it would have indicated great dullness on her part, or at least great incredulity, if she had not come to that conclusion ; for, most assuredly, it had become the principal object of the young man's life to open her eyes to the fact of his profound devotion.

And she had opened her eyes to the perception of this interesting fact ; but she had not opened her heart to the reception of it. Her heart was very differently engaged. Yet, nevertheless, the young lady did feel that there was something rather agreeable in the consciousness that there was already one man, whose very heart and soul were devoted to her. Charlotte Morris was certainly at this time rather a fine-looking girl, at least some people thought her so ; but nothing had as yet occurred to spoil her full appreciation of any homage, or any species of attention, arising from this opinion ; and, as Mr. Cornelius Folkstone was the first, and, indeed, the only individual who had as yet exhibited



any symptoms of that enchanting passion which all young ladies, and a few old ones, are intent on inspiring, it followed as a matter of course that he was an object of some interest in the eyes of my heroine, and, therefore, it was, that his name suggested itself when she was asked to select a guest for this little pet dinner-party."

"Very good, he will do very well, Charlotte. He dresses well, and is really very gentlemanlike," replied her father. "But we want another still; who must the other be, Charlotte?"

The young lady was a good deal puzzled. Their acquaintance as yet was certainly not large, and no very satisfactory name immediately suggested itself. At length, she remembered a very strikingly elegant-looking personage, and a young bachelor baronet into the bargain, who had been introduced to them at an evening-party at Brighton. "Do you ever happen to meet Sir Charles Wrington, papa? He is a very nice-looking person," said Charlotte.

"Yes, he is," replied her father, very cordially; "and I should like him to visit here

very much. I have met him several times, and he always recognises me very pleasantly as an acquaintance. I don't know where he lives, and even if I did, I don't think I know him enough to send him an invitation; but I should not at all mind asking him, if I met him by chance."

"Well then, dear papa, do go wherever you think you should be likely to meet him; but if you do ask him, be sure to remember that it is to *meet Mr. Richards*. Everybody likes to meet Mr. Richards. It is quite the fashion to have him."

Mr. Morris left her, promising to do his best to comply with her wishes, and bidding her be quite sure that, if they did not get Sir Charles Wrington, they should be sure to get somebody or other that would do very well, for that it was by no means a difficult thing to get men to come and dine with one.

Meanwhile, the Knighton family, though too much people of the world to be very easily astonished at anything, confessed themselves to be astonished now, and utterly at a loss to comprehend how in the world that girl, Char-

lotte Morris, had contrived to get the Richardses to come and dine, at five days' notice. "It is the girl who has done it, you may take my word for that," said Mrs. Knighton, in her most authoritative tone; "but *how* she has done it, is, I confess, totally beyond my power to guess or imagine."

"Upon my word, I do not see anything so wonderful in that, mamma," said Margaret. "The way she did it, was by just telling her father that she wished it, and that most good-tempered of fathers and of men set about the business directly, and achieved it."

Mrs. Knighton looked at her eldest daughter with an air of more than mere maternal superiority. She shook her head, and curled her lips.

"I have no doubt you are quite right, my dear!" said she. "I have no doubt that Miss Charlotte expressed a wish that the Richardses should be invited, and that her good-tempered papa agreed to invite them accordingly. So far, it is very plain-sailing, daughter Margaret. But now, will you have the kindness to tell me how that egregious tuft-hunter, Mr. Richards, who rarely accepts an invitation to

dinner without taking care to let the inviter understand that he has not done so without considerable difficulty, and running the risk of affronting half-a-dozen coroneted friends thereby,—will you tell how it has come to pass that he and his wife have agreed to dine at five days' notice with these perfectly unknown people, who do not even keep their carriage?"

"That is not an easy question to answer, and I give it up," replied Margaret. "But, though it is difficult to guess what it can possibly be, which has caused that darling man Richards to make such an effort in favour of people whom nobody knows, and who, as you well observe, mamma, do not even keep their carriage,—yet I see no good reason for saying that the girl did it, merely because we don't know how it was done. I do not agree with you on that point at all. I am inclined to think, that, when we know more of them, we shall find Mr. Morris to be a very superior sort of person, when compared to his daughter. She is not quite a fool, I don't mean to say she is, for I have observed that now and then she is sharp enough, when she has got an object in view; but as to her having arranged

the plot which has caught Richards, I don't believe it."

Margaret Knighton herself was rather a sharp-witted girl in her way, but utterly incompetent to fathom either the purposes or the actions of such a person as my heroine.

Up to a certain point the Knighton family were perfectly justified by their own past experience, and by many concurrent facts, in feeling sure that *something* out of the common way must have occurred to produce the result which had so puzzled them. And yet the means employed for the purpose were very simple, though, perhaps, they were a little out of the common way. The thing had been done in this wise.


It is possible that the reader may have forgotten the fact, but he has been already informed, that Miss Morris, before she left Mrs. Richards' drawing-room, contrived to learn the title of the book which the little Zelah was so earnestly reading when they found her curled up in the most distant corner of her arm-chair.

The book was "Oliver Twist," written by an individual called Charles Dickens.

The glance, which sufficed for this, was a very short one ; and the young lady passed on, and quitted the room, without eliciting or making any remark. Having been set down by Mrs. Knighton at her own door, she mounted to her own room, took off her best bonnet, laid it on the bed, and then sat herself down in her own particular chair, and began to meditate.

It would be a needless trouble, both to writer and reader, were I to follow all the thoughts of Charlotte Morris as she sat there in unbroken solitude, arranging a marvellously clever mosaic of plans for the future.

Many women of twice her age would have failed to arrive at so perfectly just a conclusion respecting the Richards family, and the use she might make of them, as she did. When the intellects are tolerably clear, the having ONE predominant object in view, as the result of everything about to be said and done, renders the chances of success infinitely greater, than when the same degree of vigorous resolution is divided and sub-divided among many things. Had Charlotte Morris set her heart



upon becoming a woman of fashion by means of a good house and fine dresses, and her own wit and beauty, she would have made a bad business of it. Her beau-ideal of fine-ladyship was the having a brilliant circle at her own house. But this circle must be gay and witty, and sparkling with all sorts of talent ; from the mimicking a bravura-singer, and the sketching a baby's face with a burnt cork on the hand of some unconscious dandy, while his innocent arm received from some quick unnoticed hand sufficient drapery to convert him in an instant into a happy father fondling his babe ;—from tricks like these, up to the sublimer efforts of spouting, singing, charading, acting, it was Charlotte's fixed resolve to rise, till she and her drawing-room had attained a name and a fame that should be dearer to her than either going to court, or having a carriage.

Many and many an hour had she, during her late visit to Brighton, paced some remote morsel of the beach in maiden meditation, not fancy free, but head, heart, and fancy, all full of such projects. These projects soon became plans, and these plans soon became plots ; and

then it was that my heroine first began to deserve the title ; for the same firmness of purpose, and the same dauntless courage in carrying it into effect, might have gained for her the title of *hero*, had she been of the nobler sex.

The heart of Charlotte positively gave a bound, when Mrs. Knighton suggested the admirable idea of having the portrait taken. It was not because it was her own portrait. Not a single spark of what is called personal vanity assisted to kindle the ambitious glow, which seemed to reach her very fingers' ends, as she listened to the proposal. She did not, for she could not, quite see all the consequences which this admirable device might bring about ; but in the self-same instant, she remembered all that Mr. Wilson (her partner at the Knighton ball) had told her about the talents and the tricks of the artist.

"I must out-trick him," thought Charlotte, in her secret soul. "I am not a lady of high rank, I am not a lady of large fortune, I am not a lady of established reputation for wit or for beauty,—but, nevertheless, I must and I will contrive, if I never buy a bit of lace or

tatting again, to make myself useful, to make myself of importance to him."

And it was thus she argued, as she dwelt upon this theme. "The great ones of the earth, who, notwithstanding their greatness, feel it necessary to bribe this Merry-Andrew in order to get him, at their beck, to lighten the weight of their golden greatness, by the explosion of a little of his wit,—these great ones of the earth can easily obtain their object by letting him have their name-cards to throw into the porcelain dish which decorates his lady's work-table, and by giving him dinners and wines, which might create a soul, as he would himself be ready to swear, under the ribs of death."

"I cannot do this!" thought Charlotte. "I cannot as yet do this. Then what is the logical inference if, after some manner or other, it must be done? Why, the logical inference," her clear head replied, "the logical inference is, that I must do something else. What this must be, what it can be, I know not *yet*. But I have strong faith that I shall find it out in time." And it was with this faith, by no means ill calculated, as she felt, to remove

mountains, that she sallied forth with Mrs. Knighton, for the purpose of expending a little of her papa's money, and a little of her own cleverness, in the hope of propitiating the favour of—Mr. Richards.

Her introduction to the painting-room has been sufficiently dwelt upon, and so has her *entrée* to the presence of Mrs. Richards and her splendid toilet. All that remains to be told is this.

Charlotte Morris, after looking at the title of the book which Zelah Richards was so luxuriously devouring, and finding it to be "Oliver Twist," went home, and despatched the following note to a bookseller in Bond Street, with whom she had already had several ready-money transactions; for Charlotte Morris, although she would have been perfectly well-satisfied to have trusted for the gratification of her own eager appetite for light literature to her circulating library, had a notion that her morning drawing-room would not be exactly all it ought to be, if she did not obtain permission from her papa to have some few score of pounds expended on the purchase of well-bound books to adorn it; which statement

her papa listened to with his usual indulgence ; and thus it happened that the subjoined note was most punctually attended to by the person to whom it was addressed :

“ Miss Morris desires Mr. Octave to obtain for her, with as little delay as possible, a complete set of the works of Mr. Charles Dickens. If all, or any of them, can be *immediately* furnished in handsome bindings, Miss Morris would prefer their being bound, but desires to receive the whole series with the least possible delay, whether bound or not. Miss Morris desires that the bill may be sent with them.”

London is a marvellous place, and among its marvels may be classed the promptitude with which such an order as that of Miss Morris was executed.

At rather an early hour on the following morning, Mr. Richards received several tolerably large packets of books, all of them more or less handsomely bound, accompanied by the following note :—

“ My dear Sir,

“ It is evident to me that you do not only

study human features, but human nature also ; and if so, you will be indulgent to me, even if you should think that I have given way to an impulse which, as yet, I have no right to indulge. The impression made upon me by the countenance, *and the employment*, of your divine little girl is too strong to be shaken off. If I live a hundred years, I shall never forget that child's face, as she devoured the pages of the great enchanter ! I dared not return to your house to look at her again ; and the only employment which suggested itself to me as likely to calm the sort of fever of spirits which was upon me, was the collecting the volumes, as pure as they are bright, which I now send you ; begging you, as an act of very kind indulgence to me, that you will make the dear little angel understand that they are her own property. The volumes should have been uniform, if possible ; but I am sorry to say it was not.

“ Believe me, dear Sir,

“ Truly yours,

“ CHARLOTTE MORRIS.”

Having slightly glanced her eyes over her

splendid present, and indited the above note, she got possession of her father, and obtained his sanction to indite the intended invitation to Mrs. Richards, in which she coaxingly, playfully, and prettily, implored her to let Zelah come too, promising that she should have a book to read in the drawing-room, while the dinner was going on below, and only make her appearance among them at the dessert.

It must be observed, however, that so very absurd an invitation would never have been sent by so sensible a young lady as my heroine, had she not learnt from good authority that "such was the custom of" the Richards' pair, in the pursuance of their educational system.

They had already begun to find it answer in many ways. The little creature was so very pretty a toy, that the loan of her for an hour or two was both useful and agreeable. And there is nothing so easy as making presents to a child !

In a word, the note to Mr. Richards and the note to Mrs. Richards were, together with

the splendid accompaniment above-mentioned, sent, seen, and approved; and thus it was that the extraordinary arrangement was made, which had plunged the Knighton family into such profound amazement.

CHAPTER XIX.

Thus far all had gone well. No fairy god-mother could have arranged things more completely to the satisfaction of my heroine than she had arranged them for herself; the only contrariety arose from Mr. Morris having failed to catch the bachelor baronet, whom they so hospitably desired should fill the vacant place at the dinner-table. But even this disappointment eventually turned out to be a great blessing; for when Charlotte hastened, as usual, when she expected interesting intelligence, to meet her father on his return from the club, he answered her enquiry, as to whether he had seen Sir Charles Wrington, by saying, "No, my dear, I have not; and I think you will be very glad that it happened

so ; for who should I see upon entering the reading-room but Mr. Knighton, with a very handsome young man beside him. And who should this handsome young man prove to be, Charlotte, but his own son ? So, of course, I asked him to dine with us on Saturday, which he has promised to do. So now, my dear, I think we shall be all right and complete, sha'n't we ?”

Charlotte thereupon expressed herself perfectly satisfied, and felt at her heart that fate had favoured her, for she thought that if the young baronet *had* been of the party, she might have found some difficulty in devoting herself as completely to the Richards family as she wished on this occasion to do.

Nor were the Knightons at all displeased at the accident which had brought Captain Knighton to his London quarters exactly in time to be introduced to their new neighbours at this select dinner-party. The father of the family, in particular, was evidently pleased at it.

“I can venture to promise you, Robert, about as good a dinner as you ever sat down to,” said he ; “and I hope you will admire

the fine girl you will see presiding at it as much as we do ; for I look upon her as quite out of the common way in superiority of talent, and most people, I believe, consider her as very handsome. You must not listen to your sisters, Bob, on that point, but judge for yourself, if you please ; girls very rarely think one another handsome. But there is one point upon which I suspect we all agree ; we none of us doubt her having a fine fortune."

The young man was at no loss to comprehend the meaning of this preface to the new acquaintance he was about to make. There could, indeed, be no mistake about it. He knew, considerably better than either his mother or sisters, how exceedingly agreeable it would be to his father, could the increased allowance, for which he had been so long pleading, be rendered unnecessary by his marriage with a rich wife ; and better still did he know, poor, gay-looking young fellow, how absolutely impossible it was that he should be able much longer to keep secret the disagreeable fact, that he was over head and ears in debt, and that a wife, with a lot of money,

was the only device he could think of, by which he might be relieved from his embarrassments. Under these circumstances, he immediately felt, that, as an honest man, he owed it to himself and his family to make no difficulties about the matter ; and while, as the last act of preparing for this providential introduction, he combed his handsome brown hair into the most bewitching curve possible, he gaily, yet rather devoutly too, thanked Heaven for having made him so very good-looking.

Mr. Morris, Mrs. Buckhurst, and Charlotte, were the only occupants of the gay-looking drawing-rooms when the Knighton trio arrived. The young man was rather quick-witted, like the rest of his family, and he saw at a glance that the thing would do very well. Mr. Morris, indeed, looked rather younger than was desirable, but his having no wife was an enormous advantage, and, as a few thousands of ready money was really all that he wanted at the moment, he felt that it would be absurd to fret about that.

As to the young lady herself, he would have been absolutely and conscientiously ashamed

of himself, if he had found the least fault in her. He saw at a glance, indeed, that her feet were somewhat larger than he approved—“*Mais qu' est ce que cela fait ?*” was the high-minded retort by which his good sense corrected his eyes, and it is not saying too much to aver that few young Guardsmen, under the circumstances, could have conducted themselves with more perfect judgment and propriety than Captain Knighton did.

My heroine was much struck, as indeed she could hardly fail to be, with the good mien and gentleman-like bearing of the young officer; but Nesselrode would have been as likely to have fallen in love with a handsome portrait, when passing on to hold a decisive consultation with his imperial master, as Charlotte Morris was to fall in love with Captain Knighton, on that important day.

The devoted Folkstone was the next guest who made his appearance, and Mr. Herbert immediately followed him; and then, though last, immeasurably greatest in the estimation of the far-sighted young hostess, swam in the flounced and feathered Mrs. Richards, followed

by her facetious-featured husband, who looked as if he were in readiness to burst into the most inspiring hilarity, at the shortest notice.

The little Zelah entered, holding by his hand ; and so pretty was she in her childish muslin frock and trowsers, that it was difficult to help looking at her even at the moment that her overpowering mamma, while marching onwards, caused a floating world of lace and satin to fly back, and very nearly extinguish her. In due time, however, they were all seated, all except Zelah, and she stood, still holding by her father's hand, though he had established himself in a chair immediately behind the sofa occupied by Miss Morris.

Captain Knighton had never chanced to see the celebrated Mr. Richards before, and he was well pleased to meet him now ; nevertheless, the judgment which he felt disposed to pass upon him at the first glance was not particularly favourable, for he thought him decidedly the least gentlemanlike looking man that he had ever seen in good society. The Morris family, however, ran no risk of suffering in the estimation of the young Guardsman

on that account. For, in the first place, he was quite aware that it was still more decidedly *bon ton* to have Mr. Richards seated at your table, than to be seated yourself on his *estrade*.


There was another circumstance also, which would of itself have sufficed to tranquillize the speculating young man's doubts (if indeed he had any) respecting the society to be encountered in the mansion of his intended father-in-law: he saw Mr. Herbert there; and, though this gentleman was perfectly well known to be a poor man,—in fact, a very poor man, in consequence of having permitted himself to be governed by opinions and principles instead of interest; and, therefore, to refuse an excellent living offered to him by a fanatical near relation, upon certain conditions of ritual conformity—though Captain Knighton knew all this perfectly well, he knew also, that Mr. Herbert was not likely to be seen, where gentlemen would dislike to appear.

Just as Captain Knighton had arrived at the decision, that the vulgar appearance of Mr. Richards and his lady need not, in any

way, interfere with his own matrimonial projects, his attention was attracted, and speedily riveted, like that of every one else in the room, by seeing Zelah leave her father's side, and, with a grave and resolute sort of step, approach the young lady of the house.

I have described Zelah Richards as a child, and so she was in appearance; but, in fact, she was at no great distance from her fourteenth birthday. But Zelah's mother had been, and still was, in the opinion of many people, very handsome, and she gladly took advantage of the tardy growth of her daughter to assist her in persuading the world that she was herself very young and handsome still.

But, rather unfortunately for this scheme, the mind of the diminutive Zelah was as much above her age as her stature was below it. Nothing could be much less true than to say she inherited the talents of her father, for nothing could be more essentially different than their respective intellects and their respective characters. Nevertheless, there was probably something of vigour in both, which indicated affinity. In one parti-



cular, at least, a resemblance between them might have been easily traced by any one who had known the father in his early youth. He had ceased to be a child very early in life, and so had his daughter Zelah. It would impede, rather than assist the progress of my story, were I to go back to the earliest period at which little Zelah Richards had begun to manifest the singularities of her character. All that her quick-witted father could make out was, that she caught the meaning of every thing which was presented to her intellect, with a degree of rapidity and clearness very rare and very remarkable.

Without at all noting what were the distinct characteristics of her mind, he only perceived that she was apt and intelligent beyond her age ; and this sufficed to make him believe that she inherited what he considered as a peculiar brightness of his own intellect ; for he perfectly well remembered that at a very early age he too, as well as his little Zelah, understood what men and women were talking about long before he was suspected of being capable of doing so. And this coincidence was quite enough to per-

suade the admiring father that his intelligent little girl was likely to become to him a second self—and thereupon he loved her with a most egotistical sort of affection.

No child, and especially, perhaps, no female child can be the object of a strongly-felt and a strongly-marked attachment, without returning it ; and Zelah accordingly loved her father as devotedly as if he had been all that a good man ought to be, instead of being pretty completely the reverse. The most obvious effect of Mr. Richards' attachment to his beautiful little daughter, was the showing her off to his large circle of friends and admirers as a marvellous phenomenon, who was the exact counterpart of what he had been himself at her age. In common justice, however, it must be confessed, that in saying this, he was himself quite unconscious of the immense extent of the lie he uttered. He was no more capable of appreciating the moral rectitude of his little girl, than she was of conceiving his moral turpitude ; and so they went on, side by side, fondly loving each other, yet much more widely severed in heart than a vast majority of

the human, beings who live and die without meeting.

The perils to which he exposed the character of the child by producing her, as an object to be wondered at, to all his fine friends and acquaintance, was greatly lessened by its having commenced at so very early an age. Vanity, like other passions, requires more or less of time to develop itself, and he allowed her none. The effect of admiration, and of being called beautiful and wonderful, was completely worn-out, before she was old enough to suffer morally from its influence. The poor little girl was often tired, but never vain, from being called beautiful and clever ; and the happy effect of this was, that her mind and manners still retained a remarkable degree of simplicity,—a charm which never left her, and of which she was as unconscious as of her quick-kindling fancy, or her unselfish heart.

But it is time to return to my heroine's drawing-room. At the moment I left it for the purpose of saying a few explanatory words concerning the little girl who made one of the party there, this said little girl was in the act

of leaving her father's side, and approaching the sofa on which Charlotte Morris had placed herself.

Before setting out upon this solitary expedition, she had exchanged a whisper with her father. "Is that young lady in the white dress the person who sent me the books?" said Zelah. To which her father answered, "Yes;" and thereupon she set off; her beautiful large eyes fixed so earnestly upon the person she was approaching, that it was evident she saw no one else.

The cheeks of Charlotte became bright with pleasure as the little girl approached her, and she eagerly held out both her hands to receive her, while she directed a momentary glance of triumph towards Mrs. Knighton at this decisive proof of ripening intimacy with the Richards family.

The moment Zelah reached the sofa, she too extended her hands, and placed them in those of Charlotte.

"I am come to your house on purpose to thank you, and I am come to your sofa on purpose to thank you; and now I am here, I

do not know what to say. Dear, dear lady ! What made you know how much, how very much I was longing for all you sent me ?”

“ I guessed it, dear Zelah, from seeing the earnest manner in which you were reading the volume you held in your hand the morning I called on your mamma.”

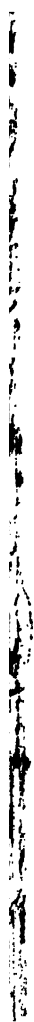
“ Oh ! I remember that morning so very well,” returned Zelah ; “ it was just when Oliver was going But how little did I think what was going to happen to me ! How shall I ever be able to prove to you how grateful I am ?”

“ By coming very often to see me,” replied Charlotte, in her kindest tone, “ and by making me hope that one of these days you may love me, as well as I feel disposed to love you.”

The beautiful little girl listened to her words with the sort of earnest attention which is only given when we feel that what we are about to hear is of great importance to us ; and when Miss Morris had ceased, Zelah continued to hold her hands for a moment longer, then pressed them very gently with her own, and

without saying another word, turned round, and quietly, without the least appearance of embarrassment, walked back again across the room, and once more stationed herself by the side of her father.

END OF VOL. I.



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